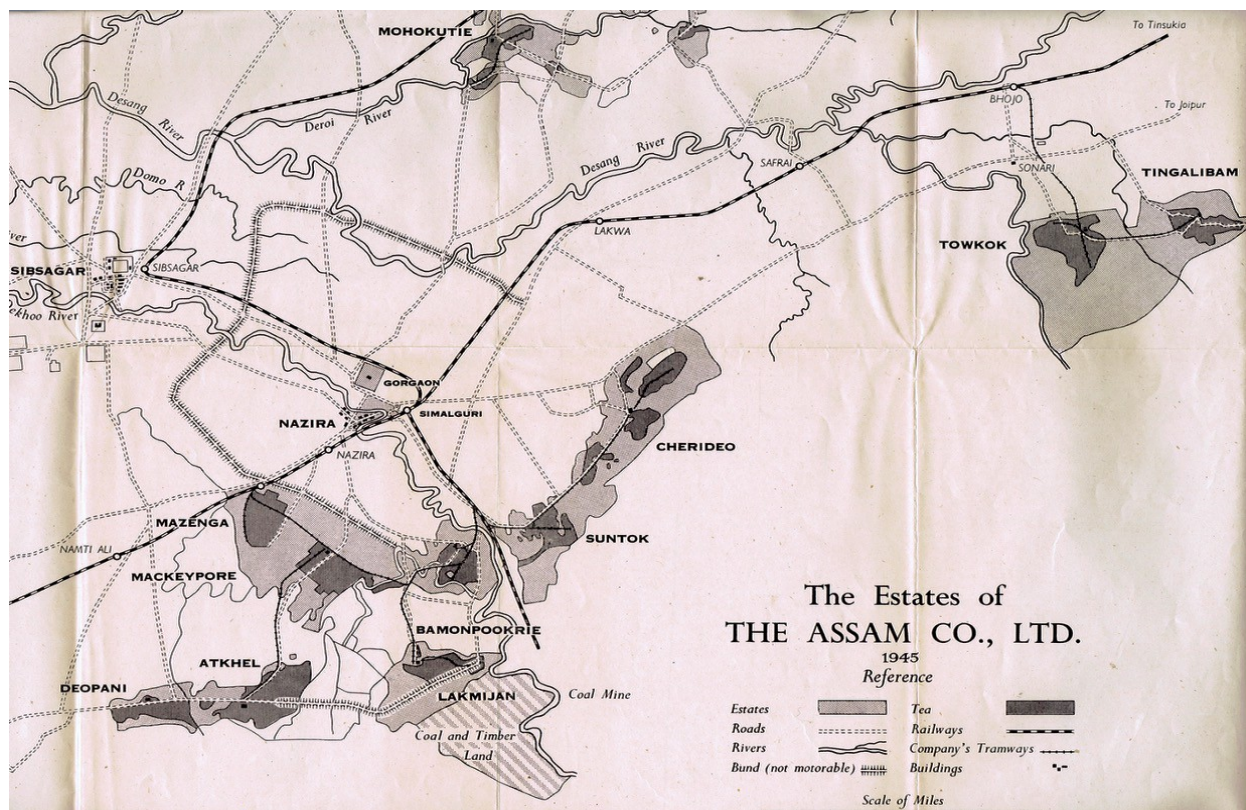


# TWENTY YEARS IN TEA

The Letters of Iris Macfarlane from Assam Tea Gardens  
1946-1965



Edited by Alan Macfarlane

## Preface

This book is a sequel to Alan Macfarlane, *India: Beginnings and Endings* (2019) which covers the years 1939-1945. That account is largely based on the diaries and letters of my mother, Iris Rhodes James when she returned to India, aged sixteen, in April 1939, through her marriage to Donald Macfarlane in March 1941, and to the end of the Second World War in 1945. The book describes their family backgrounds and their earlier links to India and Burma. Iris's family had been in India from the later eighteenth century, Donald's from the later nineteenth century.

When my father joined the Assam Tea Company in 1936, he was late in the process of the development of tea growing in Assam. The earlier story of Assam tea is told in a book by Alan and Iris Macfarlane, *Green Gold; The Empire of Tea* (2003). Three chapters in that book, written by Iris, describe the first establishing of tea production in Assam from the 1830s, the growth of tea production from 1839-1880 and the later development of the tea industry from 1880-1939, with particular emphasis on the situation of tea labourers.

This book, *Twenty Years in Tea* covers the years 1946 to 1965 on four tea gardens which Iris and Donald lived on. It is mainly based on the letters which Iris wrote to me in England, as well as a few entries in her notebooks.

My life during these twenty years is described in a series of parallel publications. The period in the south of England from 1947-1954 is recounted in *Dorset Days*. My experience at a boarding preparatory school 1950-1955 is told in *Becoming a Dragon*. The family, including Iris's parents, moved to the north of England in late 1954 and the years in the Lake District until 1960 are described in *Lakeland Life*. My life at a boarding public school from 1955-1960 is analysed in *Sedbergh Schooldays*. I then went to Oxford University to study history and my first three years are in *Oxford Undergraduate, 1960-3*. I stayed on to do a doctoral degree, which is described in *Oxford Postgraduate, 1963-1966*.

Iris and Donald retired from India in late 1965. They lived in the Lake District for three years and then moved to a croft on the island of North Uist, in the Outer Hebrides in Scotland. Iris' correspondence during this period with Alan is partly contained up to 1971 in *Becoming an Anthropologist* and her reflections on the move to the Hebrides in Iris Macfarlane, *And We in Dreams*.

It can be seen that this volume is one piece of a much larger colonial jigsaw. It is centred on Iris and Donald, (or Mac, as he was often known). A very brief note on the main actors in this volume will help to place some of the family who appear in the narrative.

Donald Macfarlane was born in El Paso, Texas, in 1916. After education in Scotland, he went to work as an engineer in the Assam Tea Company in late 1936. He helped raise the first and second battalions of the Assam Regiment in India during the Second World War and then returned to tea planting.

Iris was born in Quetta, now Pakistan, in 1922 and went home to schools in England until she returned with her mother to India in 1939. She married Donald in 1941 and had three children in India, Alan at the end of 1941, Fiona in 1944 and Anne in 1946. The whole family returned for their first home leave together in April 1947.

The children while in England and not away at school, lived with Iris's parents. Her mother, Violet, was born in Burma in 1896 and after some years of education in England, spent most of her life in India until she returned to England in January 1945. Iris's father, William, was born in India in 1886 and after education in England, spent most of his life as a military officer in the Indian Army in Burma and India, rising to the rank of Lt. Colonel. He retired to England in December 1945.



### **Editorial notes**

In editing these letters, I have tried to avoid overlap between what is contained here and the other books in the series. I have also tried to maintain, as much as possible, the flavour of the letters by leaving spelling unchanged. Only a very few remarks and incidents, which could still be hurtful to living individuals or their families, have been omitted. The books mentioned in the preface are all available on Amazon or, in the case of the autobiographical volumes, can be freely downloaded from the University of Cambridge data store by going to my web-site, [www.alanmacfarlane.com](http://www.alanmacfarlane.com) and looking under 'Life' and clicking on the title.

The value of the Indian Rupee between 1927 and 1966 was 13.33 INR to £1.  
The seer was designed as being exactly equal to 1.25 kg (1.792 lb), however, there were many local variants of the seer.

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## Returning to tea 1946-1947

The arrangements for my father's return to tea-planting are recorded in letters from the General Manager at Nazira, Assam, in the records of the Assam Tea Company for 1946.

30th April 1946

Mr. Macfarlane has also been released from the Army and arrived with Mr. Flux. I am placing him at Mackeypore (Hattiputi).

2nd July 1946

Mr Chapman turned up unexpectedly on demobilization yesterday and I am putting him at Mackeypore (Hattiputti) in place of Mr Macfarlane, whom I intend transferring to Mohokutie to take over from Mr Hill who, having been allotted passages, will be proceeding on leave within the next ten day.

9th July 1946

Mr Hill was due to leave Mohokutie this morning, after handing over charge to Mr Macfarlane.

[A reference to summer floods...]

23th July 1946

... Mohokutie was completely cut off but I managed to get into the garden by wading. I found conditions quite fair, old Mohokutie and Sologuri suffering the most. Some of the leaf that had been plucked at Sologuri it was not possible to get to the factory and it had to be thrown away. Before I left I was quite satisfied that Mr Macfarlane had the situation well in hand.

Iris left Shillong on July 26th 1946 to go to Mohokutie Tea Estate to join Donald. I was with her, aged 4½, so was my sister Fiona, aged 2, but also our baby sister, Anne, who had been born the previous month on 3rd June, and our Ayah<sup>1</sup>

The first letter is from Iris to her mother on 16th August 1946, from Mohokutie Tea Estate, India – to the Vicarage, Cumnor, Oxfordshire.

*Darling Mummy,*

*I have two letters to thank you for, as you probably knew I couldn't write myself due to the postal strike and have just got the mail which has accumulated for the last three weeks. As you see we are now safely on the tea garden after two false starts, the second one due to floods. I got Mac's wire putting me off just as we were starting off with our luggage – the whole district was under water, half our compound included. I eventually left on the 26th July and had a pretty grisly journey, though short. We had to leave Shillong at 4 a.m. to catch the Assam Mail and the only way we could make it was in a 15 cwt lorry – not the most comfortable way to do a 4 hour hill road, but the kids slept a bit of the way and were very good. We arrived at Padu [Pandu] just as the train was leaving and only had time to hurl ourselves and our 60 mds<sup>2</sup> or so of luggage into a small coupe<sup>3</sup> before it started.*

*Of course we chose the one carriage without a fan so you can imagine what it was like with all the windows blocked by trunks, tricycles etc and five of us inside! Anne screamed without ceasing just to complete the general enjoyment. We arrived at 7.30 p.m. and had another 1 hour's lorry trip before we got here so were all pretty dead and Alan was sick on*

arrival, excitement I think. Anne continued to scream till after midnight and we began to feel desperate but quietened her with a couple of bottles in rapid succession and she has hardly opened her mouth since.

This is an incredible place, the size of a small hotel at least and every modern convenience. There are four suites with tiled bathrooms attached, two sitting rooms (one the size of a ballroom) dining room and a verandah all round that is the size of the bungalow again. Everything is clean and mosquito proofed, the cook-house is on the same scale as the bungalow and there's a lovely compound attached full of flowering shrubs and trees and a mass of incredible butterflies of every colour, some the size of small birds. I did not know people lived in such luxury any where nowadays, and apparently this is not an exception as far as bungalows go, but the rule. The heat is not nearly as bad as I expected, it doesn't compare with the U.P. [United provinces] hot weather or even Quetta in my opinion.

We stay in and around the bungalow from 10 a.m. till after tea and then usually splash about in a small cement pond at the bottom of the garden which we have cleaned out for the children. They are both very fit and eat hugely specially Alan who is shooting up. Fiona being the fattest is troubled a little with prickly heat and has developed a few small boils on her forehead, but doesn't worry about either. I've weaned Anne completely and feel much better for it, and she is doing well on Ostermilk. She now weighs nearly 12 lbs and is a model baby, sleeps and plays all day and is very pink and blue-eyed. I hope we'll get some snaps of her to send, but we don't seem very successful with the camera nowadays.

We have hundreds of servants milling round us here each getting about Rs 15 a month.<sup>4</sup>

I've had a difference of opinion with my old Ayah and am sending her back to Shillong at the end of the month. She has been very much the grand lady since we got down and now wants me to provide most of her food on top of the Rs 70 a month I give her but I've struck at that. We have a nice little coolie girl who amuses the children and will manage with her until we can find another.

We've just bought a car for 1500 and Mac is having great fun taking it to pieces and I hope will manage to put it together again one of these days (that and our Frig. has exhausted our Gratuity but both were essential we felt). By the way the General Manager says we can apply for passages [back to England] next March so I think its pretty definite we'll be home about then. We are thrilled at the thought and have great plans so I hope we're not disappointed. We want to try and get a couple of weeks at the sea if possible, is there any hope of Cornwall do you think? We would like to make our base with you and dump Anne permanently, but she's going to be a bit of a tie, what hopes of a temporary nurse? Even for a month or so would help. I feel these things should be thought of months ahead with the present shortage. I suppose there's not a hope of that cottage at St Agnes?<sup>5</sup> We cant really believe its going to happen, we've been planning it so long.

Your birthday parcel has just arrived with the books for me and the kids – thank you so much. Mac has swiped my book and hardly emerged from it for the past 24 hours so I feel it must be interesting! Alan of course was thrilled to find something for him in the parcel, in fact it saved a critical situation arising as he always feels every parcel must be his. I've written off to Alan Cowan,<sup>6</sup> the Farex I will save for the journey as Groats is coming onto the market again.<sup>7</sup> Please don't spend your precious coupons<sup>8</sup> on wool for the children, or at any rate tell me how much you've used so that I can try to replace it. I've embarked on Mac's sweater at last and feel it will take me till March at least but must try to fit in some socks and oddments for the children too.

Much love from us all – Iris





Alan in a tree before he fell out and broke his arm

October 30<sup>th</sup> 1946, from Mohokutie T.E. to Mrs Rhodes James, The Vicarage, Cumnor

*Darling Mummy,*

*Two of your Airgraphs have managed to evade the latest floods and killings,<sup>9</sup> and another arrived to day, all most welcome. We are waiting on tenterhooks to hear that Aunt Margery has finally taken off, we shan't be happy about the house till we know she has finally landed on Gwalior lake!<sup>10</sup> Tell her that there is no difficulty about clothes out here and she can fit herself with a complete trousseau on arrival if that's what she is worrying about – more or less true...*

*We have heard no more about our passage but it still stands at February or March. The cars you mention are certainly a staggering price, but we feel we must have one and are trying to save a little now. We have just bought one out here for Rs. 1500 but are still trying to collect the pieces we have sent to be repaired. We can sell that if the worst comes to the worst. We will let you know definitely a bit nearer the time. If you can find a cheap second hand pram I would like it, but if not I will try and collect one in Calcutta on my way through. There are stacks of things arriving out here now, but of course we never see them here, and the postal system is so erratic nowadays we often get no letters or papers for a week at a time. I'm trying to collect clothes for coming home by sending stuff to Calcutta to be made up, but god knows if I'll ever see it back or in what condition.*

*All the riots seem to take place round the stations and trains run any time or not at all. I hope things have improved before we travel. Let me know well in advance anything you would particularly like me to bring home in the way of clothes for yourself or Robert<sup>11</sup> and I'll see what I can do. I believe you have to give coupons for anything new so don't expect too much!*

*We are all fit, and I have got an Ayah at last, the Khasi<sup>12</sup> girl who was my second Ayah in Shillong. She is a very nice little thing and I hope she stays as it makes all the difference having someone to do all the endless chores. I'm now trying to put on weight, I have been losing steadily since Anne arrived and am down to 7 stone 4 lbs in clothes and shoes, Mac thinks you will blame him and is feeding me on Virol<sup>13</sup> and cream which I don't object to!*

*The family are fit, and Alan's arm is practically normal.<sup>14</sup> Anne is fit and cheerful, and I enclose a photograph of her taken at 3½ months*



Alan with broken arm in a sling, Anne, Iris, Fiona, and Donald

*We took a couple more which we have sent to Mac's people and will send you copies when we get them, she is finally onto cows milk via Ostermilk and Cow and Gate and is doing well but refuses to finish any bottle. She doesn't seem to suffer though. She can get right up onto her knees now and will be crawling in no time. I presume I can get Baby foods for her when I get back: there is a little Groats in the market now which I will try and collect otherwise.*

*We have sent off two Xmas parcels, one to you and one to Granny [Swinhoe] as you will presumably be in the same house, and a regular order of sweets, lard and curry powder (I remember afterwards that you couldn't get rice so this may not be a success, let me know). I would send more but the things are a wicked price, 7.8 for a lb of tea etc. a sheer ramp really. We have sent from two different firms in the hopes that one of them will be honest anyway. I don't think we'll find the food difficult when we get back, we live chiefly on goat and tinned herrings here, though of course we get eggs milk and fresh fruit which are the most essential things.*



We had a couple of lads to stay last week end, ex Assam Regt., and they ate up most of our week's rations – the bazar here is pure blackmail, they won't kill a cow at all unless the cook pays their price, beef is Rs. 3 a seer [1.25kg] irrespective of whether it's meat or bone ... The cold weather does seem to be beginning at last, the days are still hot but we sleep under a blanket at night. We're having a lot of fun with our vegetable garden, and trying to hurry it on so that we'll eat the odd carrot before we leave. Caterpillars are doing their best to ruin it.

A mob has descended on the typewriter so I'd better stop and get this off. Mac's sister<sup>15</sup> is thinking of taking a Spanish degree at Oxford so the whole clan will be gathering there soon!  
Much love from us all, Iris

## Return to England 1947

Form A 197  
Name of Ship S.S. "ASTORIA" Port of Arrival LIVERPOOL Date of Arrival 16 APR 1947 P.M. 23.  
Steamship Line CUNARD WHITE STAR LIMITED. Whence Arrived SEAFORD via BOMBAY.

NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF **BRITISH** PASSENGERS

(1) Port of Embarkation	(2) Port at which Passengers have been landed	(3) NAMES OF PASSENGERS	(4) CLASS	(5) AGE OF PASSENGERS						(6) Proposed Address in the United Kingdom	(7) Profession, Occupation or Calling of Passengers	(8) Country of Last Permanent Residence	(9) Country of Intended Future Residence*				
				Adult Male	Adult Female	Child Male	Child Female	Infant	Unborn				Unborn	Unborn	Unborn	Unborn	Unborn
BOMBAY	LIVERPOOL	422 LAURENCE Margaret	GRADE "A"							s/o Midland Rk., Bedford	none	India	1				
		423 LAURENCE Ruth								do	do	do	1				
		424 LOWERY Jessie								55, Rose Hill, Greenwich. S.E.10.	H's wife	do	1				
		425 WICKERSON John								Possingworth Pk Hl., Grosvenor in Hand. East Sussex.	do	do			1		
		426 WICKERSON Marjorie								do	H's wife	do			1		
		427 WICKERSON Hazel								do	none	do			1		
		428 MORRIS Joe								7, West End Terrace, Spilby. Lincoln.	planter	do			1		
		429 MORRIS Christopher								do	none	do	1				
		430 McINTOSH Williamina								10, Rugby Parade, Belfast. N. Ireland	none	do			1		
		431 McINTOSH Jean								do	none	do			1		
		432 MATHANLY Christopher								344, King's Rd, Bolton. Bradford	banker	do	1				
		433 MACDONALD Charles								s/o Miller, 4, Maryle Rd, Dundee.	textile mechanic.	do	1		1		
		434 MACDONALD Penny								do	H's wife	do			1		
		435 MACDONALD Scott								do	none	do			1		
		436 MOSS Charles								The Vicarage, Corne Abbas, Dorset	Indian Police	do	1				
		437 MOSS Kathleen								do	H's wife	ENGLAND.	1				
		438 MOSS Gillian								do	none	do			1		
		439 MORTLOCK Arthur								25, Downside Crescent, chaplain	do	India	1				
		440 MORTLOCK Christine								Belisle Pk, London. N.W.2.	do	do	1				
		441 MARSHALL Queenie								45, Mason Way, Epsom. Surrey.	H's wife	ENGLAND.	1				
		442 MACFARLANE Donald								25, St. Margaret's, Oxford. England	tea planter	India			1		
		443 MACFARLANE Iris								do	H's wife	do			1		
		444 MACFARLANE Alan								do	none	do	1				
		445 MACFARLANE Fiona								do	none	do	1				
		446 MACFARLANE Ann								do	none	do	1				

Donald, Iris, Alan, Fiona and Anne arrived in England on 16th April 1947, as shown at the bottom of the page on the ship's manifest.

The Assam Tea Company granted Donald an extended leave although this appears not to have been granted until after his arrival in England.



Assam Co., Nazira. 22nd April 1947

Home Leave: Mr. Macfarlane has not had home leave since joining the Company on 7th November, 1936. He served in the Army in India during the war and I believe spent some time in hospital. As the staff position is now more favourable, I consider that it would be beneficial to this gentleman and the Company if 7 ½ months leave on full pay be granted.

The family spent the summer in north Oxford, and then my father returned to Assam alone and my mother and grandparents spent Christmas at Charmouth on the Dorset coast before moving to a more permanent house, rented from a distant cousin of my grandfather's near Broadstone in Dorset. [There is a full account of this period, from the return in 1947 until moving to the Lake District in 1954 in Alan Macfarlane, *Dorset Days* (2013)].



The family in Oxford: Top left to right: Robert, Donald, Iris, Anne, Billy [Iris's eldest brother],  
Richard [her middle brother]

Middle and bottom: William [her father], Alan, Violet [her mother], Fiona, Annie Swinhoe [her  
grandmother]

## 1947-1948

My father returned to India on 13th October 1947 to take temporary charge of Gelakey T.E. after his long leave. Iris stayed on in England for another year and finally left for India, by air, with Anne, on 17th October 1948, leaving Alan and Fiona living in Dorset with their grandparents.

There are a few facts about this period in the Assam Tea Company records.

Assam Co., Nazira: 8th May 1948

Mr H.D. Starkings. I enclose a report from Dr Hughes forwarded to me by Dr. Thomas. It is likely that Mr. Starkings will have to remain in Shillong for at least two more weeks for further treatment. Mr. Macfarlane is now in charge of Gelakey pending Mr. Starkings' return.

The new outgarden bungalow at Khoomba is now completed and Mr. Macfarlane will very shortly be moving into the new bungalow at Deopani. Costs of these will be advised as soon as possible.

Assam Co., Nazira: 19th October 1948

Mr D.K. Macfarlane. This gentleman left Deopani for Calcutta on the 18th instant in order to meet his wife and child on their arrival in Calcutta and to escort them back to the garden.

.....Mr. and Mrs Macfarlane and child arrived at Deopani on the 23rd instant.

Iris to her Mother, Deopani T.E. (c. 30 October 1948)

*Darling Mummy,*

*To go back to the beginning, Barbara<sup>16</sup> met us at Waterloo after a very easy journey, and we arrived at the Troups<sup>17</sup> in good time. All went well till the next day when I had to start ringing up to confirm the time of the plane, and from there on it was a muddle and we finally arrived at Calcutta completely sleepless. The plane started eighteen hours late as I think I told you, and most of that time Anne and I seemed to be hanging about at Airways house [Buckingham Palace Road] waiting to be told what to do next. The morning we left we had more hanging about, this time at the airport from 7 to 9 when we finally took off, and very cold it was and tiresome for Anne. We had nothing to eat or drink till we got to Brussels at eleven but there they produced wonderful omelettes and bacon and strong coffee which made us feel a lot better. Most of the passengers were taken on a sight-seeing tour but the two other mothers and I decided a quiet spell in a hotel would be better for the children, and were dropped there – the bus drive from the airport into Brussels was the most dangerous part of the journey I think, we went at least a hundred miles an hour on what (I was firmly convinced) was the wrong side of the road with a driver who was much more interested in us than the steering wheel! I thought the countryside very dull and bare, but apparently the other side was prettier. Anne and I slept from 12.30 till three and then ate a vast lunch which I won't describe in detail, it must have been all black market. Anne had banana with every course which amused the waiters very much. The shops had quite a lot of unrationed stuff, chocolate and so on, but I thought the people looked shabbier and less well fed than in England – everything in the shops, make-up, sweets, medicines, seemed to be English too which struck me as queer. We flew off again at 5.30 and by that time it was raining with thick cloud, but we went up through it into bright blue sky and the sunset on the darkness*

*underneath us was very beautiful. Once you get up really high the plane gets very steady and you don't appear to be moving at all, but going up and down through the different air pressures is sickening, its amazing how such a vast machine can bob about like a cork, the first few times I was simply petrified but got used to it. There were no sleepers which meant that I had Anne spread across the two seats and myself hanging over the edge, not conducive to restful sleep.*

*We got to Istanbul at midnight and had to go through the whole tedious business of standing in line to show passports etc. and then waited two and a half hours while they searched the plane for arms (so the rumour was). From there we flew to Damascus which we reached at about 6 a.m. and the same process over again. It got very hot while we were there and another long wait – we were all (the mothers and children anyway) sleepless and browned off by now – I imagine if the start hadn't been delayed we would have reached all these places at a civilised hour. From Damascus to Karachi took about 7 hours, and it was queer arriving at 2 p.m. and finding the sun just setting. Karachi was stifling and here we had medical inspections as well as the usual. They asked me if I had yellow fever certificates and I said no, well had I got cholera certificates, but I had not got vaccination certificates, at which they all laughed heartily and said that didn't matter a bit. It amused me that when we landed, before we were allowed to get off, a little man with an enormous flit gun came and sprayed us like mad, as if we were bringing germs to India! We stayed about an hour and a half there and on to New Delhi which we reached at about 11. Out again, children and all, and eventually Calcutta at 4.15 a.m. The last straw was a cow on the runway, and we had to circle round the aerodrome for twenty minutes before anyone thought of shooing it off. I don't think I had more than half an hours sleep in the last two nights and Anne only got a few hours undisturbed, but still all things considered it was a good deal better than a sea voyage. We had the final last customs inspections to cope with (and here they opened every box) and then a long drive to the hotel. Mac had brought a taxi so we did it as quickly as was humanly possible. Anne slept from 9.30 to 2.30, when we roused her for lunch, took her for a drive round, and by 5.30 she was drooping again and asleep by six. She looked absolutely blue with tiredness, and had caught a streaming cold on the way (from Chloe I think) so looked just about the bottom as I knew she would. Actually to-day, over a week later, is the first day she hasn't drooped round looking as if she was ready to drop. Poor little thing, she was very good in the plane but re-acted violently afterwards. Calcutta seemed exactly the same, apparently there are a thousand more Europeans there than before the war and quite a lot of Americans. We looked up some friends and went with them to the Swimming Club for a drink, and I was amazed to see how much the same the life seems to be. As far as the European is concerned things are much pleasanter than previously, though I believe they (the Indians) are tying themselves into knots over government. Sealdah station is full of refugees dying of cholera and starvation and nobody able to cope at all, rail travel is really out of the question now.*

*We stayed in Calcutta two days and flew up here on Saturday. We came up in a Dakota piloted by a Yank, but even so I didn't care for it a bit, it was very bumpy and he seemed to be rather a wild-looking young man to me! I was horrified to see him and his co-pilot engrossed in newspapers with the plane leaping around any old how. We eventually fetched up here at 5 p.m. and a great relief it was. Mac has got the house looking so nice and it is all shining clean of course, with lots of enamel and chromium fittings in the bathrooms and with our curtains and lampshades, when they arrive, should look quite gay. It is perched on a little hill with views all round and we have started excavations which we hope will turn into flowerbeds. I feel disembodied and quite unreal suddenly finding myself so isolated but will enjoy it once Anne has settled down I think. She is still liverish and bemused most of the time, a surfeit of bananas I shouldn't be surprised, they hang around in hundreds and she has one*



*every time she passes. I have decided not to have an Ayah for her as I really don't know what I should do with myself if I didn't have her to keep me busy. There are quite a few children around for her to play with when it gets a bit cooler.*

*I was so pleased to get your letter yesterday & hear that the children weren't upset. I hope they're not demanding too much of your time & continue to behave reasonably. Mac is as keen as I am about Canada so we hope Heather<sup>18</sup> will really stick to her word, & let us have the prospects. I miss the children every minute tho' I know they're better off in every way at home. Mac's commission (a good one of £380) has gone into the bank which will pay off our overdraft & I enclose a cheque for £100 for you for the children. Would 5 guineas a week be enough for their food & board – we feel you should make some profit out of them so don't hesitate to say if that's not enough. The 10/- family allowance could go towards Mrs Hayly, & extras like clothes & shoes & buses & medicines would be separate of course. Do say what you really feel about this. If you can possibly hang on for 6 months I'm sure we shall have found some way out of Assam! Don't forget to pay yourself back for what I owed you.*

*Oh one thing, I lost my glasses in the aeroplane, my bag upset and I thought I'd retrieved them but found them missing. I wonder if you could write to Pan-American headquarters and ask if they found them – dark glasses with pink rims – and if so to send them to you? I think that might be better than them sending them direct to me.*

*This is a terrible pen & the typewriter has collapsed. .... Must get this off.*

*Lots of love to you all & a kiss for Poppa from Anne - Iris*

Iris at Deopani to "Master and Miss Macfarlane" c.30.11 1948

*My darlings,*

*It's getting quite near to Christmas now, aren't you getting excited? I expect old Father Christmas is sitting up late every night trying to get everyone's presents ready, I can't think how he manages. Mind you be extra good or he might forget "By the Way"!<sup>19</sup> Anne won't know what it's all about this year which is lucky because we won't be able to have a nice tree or even many presents for her as there aren't any shops near us, but we shall have to give her a little stocking to hang up.*

*Yesterday she and I went to watch Daddy playing polo,<sup>20</sup> or rather practising, and she rode right across the field and back on the front of his horse. He made the horse run quite fast and she bounced up and down like a jack-in-the-box, laughing like anything. She is much braver than her Mummy I'm afraid. I wonder if she would ride on an elephant like you both did? Next Christmas we hope to have you both put into an aeroplane and flown out to see us. We will find a nice pony by then, and I will see if I can get Daddy to make a boat with an engine so we can go camping and fishing on the river, and it will be lovely fun. If Daddy flies home to see you it means Anne and I have to say behind so we thought it would be more fun for you both to come out here, don't you think so? Anne is very lonely with nobody to play with too and by that time she will be old enough to play properly. We have been given an old gramophone, and we got out all those dusty old records you used to like "The monkey and the masher" and some others, and Anne wants to play it all day. As she only likes one record, Billy Boy, it gets rather dull!*

*The other night Daddy and I were asked over to see a poojah on another tea-garden (a poojah is the same sort of thing to the Indians as Christmas is to us). We had to take Anne too but put her to sleep in our friend's house as soon as we arrived as it was quite late. I wonder if Alan remembers the Poojah he went to, with all the coloured lights and funny people dancing?. It was rather like that, there was a huge tent all lighted up, and in the middle Indians all dressed up came on and danced and sang and an Indian band played*

*loudly on and on. Then they acted a play, we couldn't understand a word they were saying of course so had to guess what it was all about, and I'm afraid we laughed a lot though I think it was supposed to be very sad as there are lots of fights and dead bodies all over the place. It went on till twelve at night, at least that's when we left though it wasn't even finished then.*

*Are you doing a play at school Alan, and if so what is it called and what part are you taking? The lady who lives quite close to us here is going home to England next week and she is taking a very small parcel for you – nothing very much because she hasn't any room in her trunk. I'm sending three little bracelets for Fiona which she might like to wear when she is pretending to be a princess or when she goes to a party, Anne wears two all the time and looks very sweet in her sunsuits with bracelets round her fat arms but I don't think yours would look quite right to wear all the time until you are in your summer frocks. The big tail-feather is for Alan and is from the jungli cock that Daddy shot the other day, I thought you might like to show it to your friends at school and it would look lovely if you made a cardboard hat and stuck it in the front, for a prince or Robin Hood. I'm going to see if the mistri [master craftsman] has time to make two tiny boats which you can paint and make little sails for and sail in puddles.*

*I've also sent off a parcel with two tins of condensed milk and two tins of peanuts, it is addressed to you but I hope you won't sit down and eat the whole lot by yourselves! I thought you might give one tin of the nuts to Granny and share the other, you could take a few to school each day. I will get some more in a little while. Anne simply loves them and we can't get the tin away from her once she starts!*

*Are you feeding the birds yet? You won't forget them in the winter will you, because they can get so little food then. Tell me how many kinds you see and if the same ones come every day. Our china duck is very funny, he hangs round the door of the cookhouse nearly all day now and when I get the chickens food ready he and Bruce<sup>21</sup> for the pieces that fall on the floor and the duck usually wins. We don't have many kinds of birds round the house, but when we go out we see some lovely ones, parrots fly over in hundreds sometimes.*

*Yesterday evening Daddy heard there was a leopard on the road so he got his gun and went out in the jeep and there it was sitting by the side of the road. It was quite high up but it just sat and looked at him, so he rushed back to get a better light to shoot it by, but when he got there again it had gone. As soon as he shoots one I will send you its teeth, I don't suppose any of the other boys at school have leopards teeth! I'm also going to start butterfly hunting, and I want to get a book about them because we get some wonderful ones here as big as birds. I want to find out how to stuff them or whatever you do to keep butterflies.*

*I have just been reading all about worms, did you know that there were 2,000 different kinds of worms and that they moved 11 and a half tons of mud in one field in a year?!*

*Well darlings, Anne has woken up so I must say good-bye for now, but I will be writing again in a day or two and sending that Story I promised. All our love, Mummy. Xxxxx [note in pen at top 'Daddy has shot the leopard!']*

Benjamin a Marmaduke.  
Benjamin the Baby Mooluk

D Stories for Alan & Fiona  
c 1948

Chapter 1. How They make a plan.

Benjamin sat in his little box and stared out at the beginning of the new day. He was the first awake as usual, and as usual too he was hungry. He picked up a bit of banana skin that was lying at the bottom of the box and bit into it but it was nasty, as he had known it was going to be. He always hoped that somehow it would have changed its taste from yesterday. He spat it out and scratched himself thoughtfully, wondering how long it would be before anyone else woke, wondering if he dared climb one branch higher on the tree in front of the cookhouse, wondering if They would perhaps forget his bath to-day. He wished he could explain how a very small monkey felt when it was held under the cold tap, the icy ~~said~~ drowning feeling, the roar of the water round his head, the stinging and choking and gulping, the misery of wet fur that dripped and clung. Just thinking about his bath made him shiver. But They might forget. If They were busy They often did. He gripped the sides of his box, which were made of wire netting, and swung slowly backwards and forwards, occasionally turning a somersault to pass the time. The sun came up full and strong and Marmaduke the Hill Mynah woke up and cocked a beady eye at him from the cage next door.

"Morning" said Marmaduke "Been up long?"

"Hours" said Benjamin "And I'm starving. Got a small piece of banana you could spare?" He reached a long skinny arm through the wire netting hopefully.

"Awfully sorry, I ate the last of it before I went to sleep. I could manage a grain or two of rice though. Its a bit soggy, it fell into my water" He poked his beak through the hole in his cage and dropped four grains of rice into Benjamin's outstretched hand. Then he hopped up and down on his perch, flapping his wings and practising a little song he had thought of in the night. He sang it twice through and then cocked his head at Benjamin who was eating each grain separately to make them last.

"Like it?" he said in casual sort of voice

"Like what?"

"That little thing I was singing. It came to me quite suddenly just before I went to sleep and I was afraid I might have forgotten it this morning. You know how it is when you think of things in the night and they seem awfully clever and then in the morning you can't remember anything except that you did think of them"

"What little thing?" said Benjamin

"I sang it twice you must have heard"

"All your singing sounds the same to me"

"Really it must be dreadful not to have any ear for music at all" said Marmaduke ruffling his feathers crossly "Why when I was your age I'd composed several quite long songs!"

Benjamin licked his fingers slowly one by one to get the last taste of anything that might be on them.

"How old am I would you say Marmy?" he asked

"Exactly half as old as I am of course. I've been here twice as long haven't I?" He was still rather peeved because he had hoped for a little friendly encouragement after going to the trouble of singing the whole thing through twice...

A Page of the children's story which Iris sent to Alan and Fiona in parts with her letters.



1949

Iris at Deopani to Alan and Fiona 16th February 1949

*My darlings,*

*I have been waiting to get some proper forms to write to you on but don't seem to be able to at the moment so I'm afraid this will take a bit longer. How are you? Granpa wrote the other day and said you were going to have Whooping Cough injections but I don't think they are very nasty ones are they? I hope Granny's indigestion is better and the doctor found out what was giving it to her. Anne gave us a fright by running a high temperature the day before yesterday, she woke up in the middle of the night and said "Oh my heads broken" and we found she had fever and it went on all day and the next night and then suddenly went again – we never discovered what it was but she was very miserable and very difficult to keep in bed. She hates being kept indoors at all so I don't know what we are going to do with her when it gets really hot.*

*In the evenings when Daddy is busy she and I and Bruce go out onto a big open space near the bungalow and practice golf. What really happens is that I hit the ball and we spend the rest of the afternoon looking for it, and usually all the coolie children join in until there is awful confusion and we have to come home in disgust. There is one coolie boy who is a bit mad, Anne calls him "Poggly Woggly" and roars with laughter at him, he isn't very mad but just enough to be funny. Her latest idea is to collect little lambs she sees wandering round the roads and tie bits of string round their necks and bring them home. The other morning she went out very early and I was still in bed when I heard the most peculiar noise like a horn gone squeaky and in staggered Anne carrying a very cross little lamb in her arms, upside down like a baby with its legs sticking up in the air! She plonked it on my bed and it snuggled down very frightened and miserable and then of course we had an awful time persuading her to take it back to its Mummy again. Now every time we pass one in the car she shrieks that she wants it. I think she will be a zoo-keeper when she grows up, she loves animals so much.*

*Last Sunday we spent the morning by our little river, there are some lovely quiet sandy places shallow enough for Anne to play in and she enjoyed herself catching "fish", really bits of slimy sort of sea-weed that wiggled about in the water like fish. Daddy and I spent a lot of time catching her a couple of real little tadpole things but she wasn't nearly as interested in them as her own pretending ones.*

*It is starting to get hot again, though its not at all bad yet. I wonder if your warm winter is going on, it will be sad if Granpa's bulbs get frost bitten, they must be very pretty. We have quite a lot of flowers out now and they are bringing us butterflies and bees which is rather nice. I'm going to make myself a butterfly net and see if I can catch some and dry them, we get some wonderful ones here, perhaps you remember them. What about you doing the same and we'll see who can get the most different kinds, except there are two of you and you can run faster than me. I haven't discovered how you dry them yet but I'll let you know as soon as I do. Of course your butterflies in England don't start for a bit yet and you don't get as many kinds.*

*Daddy is going out duck shooting again this week-end, I don't know if I shall go but I hope I'll be able to. There are about ten other men shooting too and we hope there will be enough duck to go round. They start flying back to England soon for the summer, mallards (like Ploof) and teal and shovellers and all kinds of others, nobody can understand how they can find their way all those thousands of miles, sometimes to the very same lake they left a year ago.*

*Daddy said he would add a bit so I will leave a bit for him. Be good darlings, I hear Fiona is a very hard worker at school, won't it be fun when you can both read? Anne will have a*

*lovely time and so will I as you will be able to do all the reading! All love and kisses from her and me.*

*[Hand-written letter from Donald] How are you both? As Mummy has told you poor Anne has not been too well, I think she was half ill and half acting because she loves breakfast in bed with all her dolls and toys stuffed in beside her. We are going duck shooting this weekend and I wish you were here to come with us. I am sure that you would both love it. When Alan grows a bit bigger and can manage to hold a gun I shall probably give him mine. I hear that they are trying to stop shooting at home now as they think it is cruel but I think it would be a great mistake in stopping one of the greatest sports in England and one for which she is famous. I am just going to see my horse, "Ramma", is fit for Mummy to ride. "Ramona" came back from Polo the other day very lame. Did you know Mummy is very keen on riding and so is Anne. Well darlings lots of love and kisses, be good   Daddy*

Iris to Fiona and Alan from Deopani, with addition from Donald, 15th April 1949

*My darlings,*

*Here is Chapter 4 for you, it ends off rather hurriedly because I've started to bottle tomatoes again and can't concentrate. The last lot have turned out all right thank goodness so I've taken my courage in both hands and am doing some more. Our baby chicks are very well too, Daddy said he would leave them to me this time as he brought up the last lot and I think he is quite disappointed they have done so well. He says the main thing is not to let them get their feet wet and this morning I went out to find someone had let them out and they were splashing about in large puddles as it had been pouring with rain so I only hope nothing happens to them. I got a bit of cloth and wiped their feet carefully so maybe it won't.*

*We are expecting the other two lots of eggs to hatch this week-end, do baby duckling get the same to eat as chicks? Granpa knows all about them.*

*We have had nothing but rain and storms for the last five days which is nice in a way because its cool but when it rains here it comes down in sheets and the whole place becomes a bog. As we are on a hill our vegetable garden and chicken run slope steeply and Anne and I go slithering and falling about trying to collect tomatoes or look for eggs. As Granny will have told you the goose broke her eggs and there was nothing in them which was disappointing.*

*I'm longing to hear about Fiona's birthday and whether you were able to sail your boats or not, I expect it was a horrid wet day, it always is just at the wrong time but I'm sure you had fun anyway. Are you out of quarantine yet? I suppose the holidays are half over already, but still you have had such long holidays now that you will be glad to get back to school again.*

*What can we do to make you want to learn to read Alan? What about ten shillings the first time you open a book (any book) and read a sentence straight off without stopping? I wish you knew what a lot of lovely books there were waiting for you to read, I'm sure you'd learn in a week if you did. Anne knows all her nursery rhymes now and sings very well in tune, the Ayah teaches her hymns and she shouts them all through meals which isn't so funny. The kitten is very funny but always at the wrong time, it loves Anne in spite of the fact that she holds it round the neck until it makes gurgling noises but it stalks our pigeons, so far it is too small to do much harm but I'm afraid will catch them later.*

*Oh dear, I feel exhausted, the tomatoes were ready and needed putting water on, it started to rain and the baby chicks had to be put away, the doctor arrived to spray the bungalow and wanted things covered and Daddy blew in and said if I wanted to come with him would I come this minute, all at the same time and I don't quite know if I've sprayed the tomatoes*

*and bottled the chicks at the moment! It is the sort of thing Granny is doing all the time I expect but I am not so good at it yet.*

*Anne has gone off for her walk with her bit of stuff round her neck as she does every evening and I'm going to have a cup of tea before I start on the chickens, with the two broodies and the babies I find it takes hours. I expect you help Granny with all hers don't you, I hope so.*

*Are you playing football or cricket at the moment, we listened to Scotland playing England last Saturday and Daddy was very pleased with himself because "his" side won. He has just painted the car, sea-blue with red wheels, it looks smashing.*

*Well darlings this isn't a very long letter I'm afraid but there doesn't seem to be much news as I only wrote a few days ago. Our love to everyone and lots and lots to you my pets, Mummy*

*[Hand-written letter from Donald] Mummy has just told me that I am very naughty because I never write to you. I am sorry but she does write about everything and does not miss much! I wish that both of you were here to help with the animals that we have. Mummy and Anne are both hatching and looking after lots and lots of baby chicks and we are expecting baby ducklings any time now. Another thing I am sure you could do, is help me catch some fish. In the small lake below our bungalow, some time ago I put some wee, wee, fish and now they have grown very big and should be caught. I am sure that they would be very nice to eat. Do you know anything about fishing? It really is good fun and maybe when we come home I shall try and teach you. It is quite difficult really, because in the lake there is a lot of weed and the fish when caught rush down in the water and this tangles the line round and round the weeds and you simply cannot pull it out without breaking the line. When you come out I will show you what I mean.*

*I have just finished painting our car. It is rather an old car but it goes very well. I have painted it blue with red wheels. Do you think that would look nice? What about you telling me what colours you would like to have a car. Anne thinks that the car is broken because it has no hood. I shall have to put that on because she does not like going in a 'broken car'.*

*Well darlings do write to Mummy, Anne, and me because we love to hear what you are doing. Remember and let me know what colours you would like to have the car. Lots and lots of love and kisses. Daddy.*

*Iris at Deopani to Alan and Fiona, 25th May 1949*

*My darlings,*

*As usual I've been very naughty about sending this story, so much so that I had forgotten where I got to and this one is very old and rather dull I'm afraid. I really will send a bit each week from now on, I don't know why it is but every time I sit down to write it something happens to disturb me or the typewriter gives out or something. Its not too good at the moment actually, I hope Granny can read what I've written. It's getting quite hot now which makes me feel terribly lazy, I start off writing a letter and find after half an hour I have only written the address at the top, my arms feel like bits of sea-weed and I'm always wanting to go to sleep. The hot weather always makes me feel like that, I think its because I don't do enough, Daddy walks and bicycles all day and comes in dripping wet and scarlet in the face but after a cold bath he feels grand.*

*All our animals are well, the puppies are sweet now, they are nearly three weeks old and are tottering round, wagging their scraps of tails and practising big grown-up barks. The only trouble is, their Mummy is rather losing interest in them and doesn't want to feed them, because its so hot I suppose. To-day I got rather worried and thought I'd better do something*

*about them myself, so I made some Ostermilk for them. They all put their faces in and blew bubbles and choked and spluttered but in the end tried to drink it and found it pretty good, they spent half an hour afterwards licking the last drops from each others faces. They are completely square with dark blue eyes, we have found homes for four of them so have only one left, but we shant be able to get rid of them for another three weeks at least. We shall really be sorry to see them go although they are messy little things.*

*The wee monkey is still very wee but full of beans and always ready for a banana or two. We took him out into the garden the other day and put him up a tree, thinking he would love it but he was petrified and cried and cried until we got him down. Anne said she would show him and started to climb up herself but lost her nerve half way and had to be rescued too. The chicks we have left are growing long and leggy but I'm afraid there is only one hen among them which is very disappointing. We think one of our rabbits has had babies because she has plucked all her hair out but we don't know where, as there is no sign of them. One of the pigeons was taken by a cat the other night, the wretched thing got in through a window and into our larder and knocked down one of my jars of bottled tomatoes in the middle of the night as well, rather like the mysterious "burglar" who broke one of Granny's! Our own little white cat has got a passion for the dog we are looking after and is for ever jumping up and making playful dabs at the dog's face, one of these days it will find itself without a head I'm afraid.*

*As you can see Anne and I keep ourselves busy most of the day with some animal or other. She goes out on the horse in the evenings quite often now, it gets taken for a walk every evening and she sits on its back and jogs slowly up the road and back. Now that it's hot she can't go out much before five or half past but she has her sandpit and pool to play in and is up and out very early in the morning so she doesn't mind. It will be her third birthday next week but I'm afraid I shan't give her a party, it's too hot. Her ayah is going away for a month's holiday about then which I'm not looking forward to much, although looking after just one will be simple after the three of you!*

*I'm afraid I haven't caught any more butterflies, I must start again, the puppies and monkeys and things are taking up most of my time and then Daddy doesn't like it if I go chasing after butterflies when he comes back. I have seen some lovely ones lately which I must really try and catch. Actually Anne and I set out with the net the other morning but when we got as far as the lake we turned it into a fishing net and caught some wee fishes instead.*

*You will laugh when I tell you that Daddy is going to try and play Rugger on Sunday. He hasn't played since he was at school and thinks he will probably die starting again in this heat but I tell him he must get into training so as to take you on, Alan. Have you started cricket yet or aren't any of your friends at school interested? Who do you like best in your form now, and who does Fiona? Do you go and see any of the other boys on your bicycle?*

*It is half past eleven at night and as I get woken at six I think I'd better finish this now darlings. I'm still sweating and I shall be glad to get into the bedroom under the fan. Daddy has been asleep for the last two hours! Lots and lots of love and kisses from Daddy and Anne, Mummy xxxxx oooooo*

*[in] pen – 'Anne got at the typewriter while I was writing the story, as you see!*

Mid to late June 1949 Iris to Alan and Fiona, first page(s) missing

*....[Anne] has gone off with Daddy this morning to give me a chance to write this, as her Ayah hasn't come back yet. The last puppy went on Sunday and I thought now I was going to have some peace, but yesterday a baby mongoose was brought to be looked after! It is very frightened and goes off like a pop-gun if you try and do anything to it, and I think I shall put*

*it back in the jungle. Even if it did get tame and live, I'm afraid it would kill my chickens. While I've been writing this letter I've been watching two mynas<sup>22</sup> with their children, the father bird has taken one baby, and the mother the other and they've been finding food and popping it into the little one's mouths. The big birds take long steps and the little ones patter after them, complaining that they walk too fast, they're really very funny to watch. Yesterday a little bird fell out of its nest right at my feet, I picked it up and it seemed alright but it died. We have been out with Daddy shooting green pigeons once or twice, he always hits them but often loses them in the jungle. His horse comes up to the bungalow to be fed now, 3 times a day, which amuses Anne. She pinches some of its food for her own little wooden horse, and even tries to put reins round my neck and feed me with oats!*

*The man is waiting to take this so I hope you'll forgive a short letter and the story will make up, its all true (the story) so its like a letter really isn't it? I was glad to hear you won a race in your sports Alan, next year you should win everything! Lots of love, my pets, from us all, Mummy xxx ooo*

Iris at Deopani to Alan and Fiona, 16th August 1949

*My darlings,*

*You will quite certainly be back home again by now and I hope not giving Granny fits by putting dirty finger marks all over her lovely new paint. You will be pleased to see your toys again I expect – and Granny and Granpa of course! I wonder what sort of a journey you had back and whether you got as dirty as you did on the way up.<sup>23</sup> Our wireless has gone funny so we don't know what sort of weather you are having but I hope its nice and you're getting some cricket.*

*Here it has been raining a lot so its cooler than when I last wrote, the rain is good for everything except my baby chicks who have to be indoors most of the time but when the sun does come out it dries the ground in no time and they usually get out for an hour in the evening. One died after two days but the rest are very perky and Anne and I spend a lot of our time taking them little bowls of this and that to eat.*

*Yesterday evening we were given a young mynah, a hill mynah which learns to talk like a parrot, but it is so young I don't know if it will live. It opens its beak wide for food and if I drop something in takes no notice, but if I touch the bottom of its mouth with my finger it swallows the food and my finger too, so I have to let it do that every time to Anne's great concern, she thinks I'm being bitten. It is a black bird with yellow legs and bill and if it lives we are going to hang it on the verandah in a cage and teach it to talk. I wish the animals I'm given weren't quite so young and helpless though, they all need their mothers and it makes me very sad to see them so frightened and hungry.*

*The monkey is quite amusing now, he plays hide and seek with the cat in the bushes and explores a little as long as he knows that I'm close at hand to come back to, but if I walk away he screams and chases after me. When I go for a walk with Anne in the evening I take him too, we walk along to the stables and then I sit down on a log of wood while Anne and the monkey amuse themselves collecting sticks and stones and then we walk home again!*

*Last week-end Daddy and I were invited away and we dropped Anne with her friend Babs<sup>24</sup> to spend the night. On Sunday morning however Babs got a bad sore throat so we had to go and collect Anne and take her to where we were staying where there was nobody for her to play with, but she liked it because it was a change and there was a bath she could climb down into instead of being lifted up into. We had quite an excitement because while were sitting on the verandah before lunch the cat chased a cobra out of the drain. Daddy got a stick (much too small a one I thought) and there was someone there with a revolver and they went after it and after firing three times and hitting it over the head they killed it. It was quite*

big for a cobra, over four feet we thought though we didn't measure it. The man who shot it was a policeman, he and two others were out looking for some bandits who had robbed a train and shot someone and they happened to call in to ask their way, we wondered after they had gone whether they would have better aim when shooting a bandit! Anne was in bed and missed all the fun.

I'm afraid I've been naughty and haven't written the story as I said I would so I drew this picture instead.



Coloured plan of Deopani bungalow and surroundings, with Ayah's house, cook house, rabbits, chicks, ducks, sandpit etc.

It shows the back of our house as you come up to it from the road, the front is just a lawn and a lovely view over to the hills. I don't know if it will really give you any idea of this place, of course everything is the wrong size but Daddy didn't feel like drawing this evening, he would have done it much better. Perhaps I'll persuade him next time. Anne walks down the back steps and down past the hospital and over the cattle trap every evening and then along the main road to the stables. The long snake from the cook house is a big drain that she takes great pride in being able to jump over now, she couldn't when she first arrived. The whole thing is on quite a steep hill with our house on the top.

It is quite late and Daddy has been in bed for hours and I'm sitting alone in the drawing room with all sorts of excitements going on, lizards chasing flies, the cat chasing lizards and a large toad plopping around after beetles and chewing them up with noisy crackling munches. But still I think its time I went to bed really. We thought your reports were very good and are glad you are moving up Alan.

This is the next morning and its pouring with rain again – Anne is so interested in the picture that I haven't been able to paint it much! Hugs and kisses from us all, Mummy xxx  
ooo

Iris at Deopani to Alan and Fiona, 24th November 1949

*My darlings,*

*Here at last is the beginning of a new story – afraid its not very interesting yet but it should get better as it goes on! If you think its too awful let me know. We've had two grey cold days with a bit of rain which I think is lovely but most people complain if the sun goes in for a minute. The Darby children are back<sup>25</sup> for a couple of days and this afternoon I took them and Anne over to tea with Babs – they enjoyed it a lot but Anne got very cross towards the end and I had to remove her before she got really violent! She and Xania spend their time fighting over an enormous doll that belongs to Xania's elder sister and I shall have to remove it to-night and hope that they'll have forgotten about it in the morning – its too exhausting having one or other of them squealing all day.*

*Daddy is going shooting to-morrow and spending the night camping, I wish I could go too but I will next time I can find somebody to take Anne. I hope it doesn't pour with rain the whole time as it quite likely might. Last night a tiger killed fairly close to the bungalow but then it deluged so Daddy couldn't sit up for it – he's been hoping for a kill for so long too. I don't think my chicks have got cholic after all thank goodness – but they're still not laying, so it wouldn't much matter if they had! I'm struggling on with my gardening and have one baby cauliflower appearing, which we all go and peer at every morning. Everything looks better for the rain – oh yes, I've got one flower out too!*

*Anne has switched back from cows to lambs again thank goodness – she had one here this morning and was carrying it in her arms for hours, bleating sadly!*

*Daddy has been in bed ages and I'm very sleepy, so forgive a short letter darlings. Be good and help Granny as much as you can because she's going to be very busy over Christmas. Lots and lots of love from us all – Mummy.*

Iris to Alan from 'By the side of the River', 11th December 1949

*My darling Alan,*

*This is to wish you a very happy birthday darling, I'm sure you'll have a lovely time and get some nice presents. Daddy and I and Anne will all be thinking of you and wishing you many happy returns. I have started this letter sitting outside our little hut on the banks of the Dikhu<sup>26</sup> river, Daddy and I came up yesterday and go back the day after to-morrow. Its lovely here, I'm going to try and draw you a picture or two, as a matter of fact I've started one of the view from where I'm sitting now but Daddy has just been looking over my shoulder saying its nothing like that at all – Anyway thats what it looks like to me!*

*We arrived here in time for lunch yesterday, we had to leave our car and come up in boats with our luggage but it only took about twenty minutes. The boats they use are narrow wooden canoes and very wobbly. A man stands up and paddles at each end and I must say they manage them marvellously. We sat in one canoe and all our stuff went in another, including an enormous bedding roll which looked as if it was bound to tip over! The river is mostly deep and smooth but every so often there is a narrow shelf where its very fast and shallow and its quite a business getting a boat up against the current. The men leap out and push and pull and we just sit and hang onto the sides!*

*There are two little bamboo huts here, side by side on a steep bank with steps leading up and a bamboo table and chairs outside (where I'm sitting writing this) and lots of banana trees round to give shade, I'm going to try and draw that for you too. We have put our bedding roll on the floor of one of the huts, we brought a large mattress and six blankets with us, but it was still pretty hard last night, and squashed up! When we arrived we unpacked*



*and laid everything out and then had a cold lunch and then I got into my bathing dress to sunbathe. After a few minutes I wrapped the rug I was lying on round me several times it was so cold – but I went in for a bathe and stayed in at least five minutes – it was freezing! Daddy got out his fishing rod and stood up to his waist in water for about an hour but didn't get a bite! We lit a fire and had a cup of tea when we were both really cold, and then it started to get dark. So we collected our supper things and settled down for the evening. It was lovely sitting by the crackling wood fire with the river running by – the boatmen took the boat out and lit a flare and tried to spear fish and it looked so pretty, the flaming torch reflected in the river and the man standing with his spear raised ready to poke it if a fish rose.*

*Home again.*

*I had to stop writing because it started piling up for rain – we managed to boil a kettle and give ourselves a cup of tea and get some of the firewood inside before it started and after that there was nothing for it but to sit inside our hut by the light of the lamp and make the best of things. Actually it was rather cosy with the rain beating on the roof (and dripping through in places!) – we made Bovril and ate biscuits and then went to bed and slept like logs in spite of the hard floor and woke to a beautiful morning.*

*After breakfast we took a boat and went on a long fishing expedition up the river – it's really a lovely river as the hills rise up steep and wooded from its banks and it opens into wide places almost like lakes – I told Daddy I thought it must be something like a Scottish Loch but he said “Poof” scornfully – of course there's nothing to him like a Scottish Loch!*

*I got out after a bit and lay and sunbathed on a sandy island and went in for a swim, there were some lovely big rapids I wanted to shoot down but Daddy said I mightn't get back again so I couldn't. However when we got back to our camp I made him take off his clothes and bathe with me, he screamed at the cold water but we had great fun floating down some quite fast rapids near the huts and then we found a bamboo raft and shot down on that and felt very braced and hungry. We did wish you had both been there, and Anne, there were some lovely little islands you could have played on – but we hope you will have a holiday out here after we've been home to see you and then we'll do everything.*

*In the afternoon I tried to paint but I'm afraid I wasn't a bit successful and the only thing I could do was this picture of our huts. Not a nice picture but I've come to the conclusion I can't paint! The green sausage-looking things are banana trees! Daddy fished again but didn't get a bite, I think he must have got the wrong sort of bait as there were lots of fish about.*

*In the evening we had our camp fire like the first night and this morning we cleared up, burnt our rubbish, and came home – rather sad but it was lovely to see Anne again and there was a letter from Granny waiting for us and the chickens had laid two eggs and all our dahlias were out so it was really very nice to be home. Daddy went straight to bed after lunch just for the pleasure of some springs and a comfortable mattress under him! Benjy<sup>27</sup> was very pleased to see us, or me rather, but the cat didn't take much notice. Well darling, my eight-year-old!<sup>28</sup> I have lots and lots of Christmas letters to write so must get this off.*

*Hugs to Fiona and please tell Granny I'll be writing to-morrow. Lots of love and kisses,  
Mummy, xxxx ooo*

## 1950

A directive from the Assam Co. 17th January 1950 concerning postings of managers and acting managers for the next rains included another move by Donald to Mackeypore as acting manager.

Iris to Alan and Fiona, May 1950 Mackeypore T.E.

*My darlings,*

*Here at last is another chapter of the story, I was interrupted so many times while writing it that I don't know if it makes sense even. Anne had a go at the typewriter while I wasn't looking too so altogether its rather a mess. It has been very hot this last week and as the only time I seem to have to myself is in the afternoons, I find I'm so hot and sleepy that I drop off between every sentence.*

*It's a long time since I heard from you all so I do hope everything is alright and nobody is ill. As I wrote at the end of my letter to Granny, Daddy went to bed with a high temperature and was feeling miserable but after two days in bed he got up and is much better to-day (the 4th day) I don't know what was the matter, a chill I think, it is a horrible time of year to be ill as its so beastly sticky and our bedroom is rather dark and depressing. He is not a good patient because he so seldom gets sick, and was worrying the whole time about all the things he should have been doing instead of lying back and enjoying the rest, anyway its all over now thank goodness. He got quite pale (for him) and lost about four pounds in weight but I'm afraid he has put that on again already!*

*Anne and I have been leading a very quiet life, the only excitement for her was last Saturday when we took her to Nazira and she and all the other children swam while we played tennis.<sup>29</sup> The pool was only half full, not even that, so they could splash about to their hearts content without drowning. She spends most of her time here under a tap outside the garage, she has a passion for washing the dog and he bears it most nobly, just looking at her pathetically as if to say "Really, must you".*

*I think I told you our rabbit has produced a family, two of the three died but the one that is left is very sweet. The mother has made a nest for it in the corner of her wire netting and we can watch it, it sleeps most of the time but when its hungry it starts leaping and twitching like a shrimp, it's the size of a largish mouse at present and still a bit pink. I have a broody sitting on nine eggs (there were ten but she broke one) so will have still more animals on my hands soon.*

*Benjamin has got used to this place now and plays around the garden all day quite happily, I sometimes wonder if he will take it into his head to run away like in the story! Yesterday I took Anne for a walk after tea and we looked into the next-door bungalow where Daddy's assistant lives, to see his menagerie, he has a puppy of a few weeks and a kitten of a few days. Anne wasn't interested in the puppy but fell for the kitten which was a minute ginger thing the size of a frog. Unfortunately the mother cat got a bit worried and grabbed the kitten by the scruff of the neck to carry it away and Anne thought she was killing it and tried to pull it out of her mouth and I thought they had killed it between them. An awful scrum. Then Max tried to attack one of his dogs so the shouting and the dust was fearful, it always seems to end like that when Anne and I do anything together. My butterfly net is made at last so I shall have to start running after the silly things, actually there are some lovely ones around if only it wasn't so hot.*

*There seems very little news in spite of the fact that I see from my diary<sup>30</sup> that I haven't written to you for ten days. Every day is much the same now and I seem to spend hours and hours standing about watching Anne feed the horses or wandering backwards and forwards*

*with scraps for the chickens. Granny will have told you that my passage is booked on the "Himalaya" to come home in the autumn, I believe it's a very grand ship with telephones by every bed and twenty courses to each meal, a bit different to the voyage we all did home or perhaps you don't remember?!*

*Well pets, no more for now – I hope you are enjoying the summer term and getting some summer – our wireless isn't working so I don't know what's happening at home. I'm writing to Granny for her birthday, but if doesn't arrive in time please get her something from me will you? Lots of love and kisses, Mummy xxxxxxxx ooo*

Iris to Alan and Fiona from Mackeypore T.E. 22nd August 1950

*My darlings,*

*This has been an awful week, starting with an earthquake and ending with 'flu! Actually neither the earthquake or the 'flu are quite finished, but I thought I must try and write a line or you might be worrying. We haven't been getting any mails coming in for nearly a week, but I hope this won't be held up.*

*The earthquake was a week ago, I expect you heard about it on the wireless, it was very frightening although not much damage was done round here.<sup>31</sup> It happened at about 8.30 in the evening, Daddy and I were having dinner and he had just gone into Anne to show her a funny beetle that had flown in. I felt my chair beginning to move and at first thought it was a cat underneath until I looked up and saw the ceiling moving too. I shouted to Daddy and flew out and he came running out with Anne a minute later, dumped her with me, and flew off to the factory. It got worse and worse, a terrible roaring noise went on and I could hardly stand up, the ground was rolling up and down like the sea and the hedges looked like snakes! The lake tipped right up and spilt into the garden and all the servants and all the coolies for miles round started howling and moaning, it was the most peculiar (and horrible) feeling, standing in the dark listening to it all, and it seemed to go on for hours, actually it only lasted 5 minutes but that is quite long for an earthquake.*

*The only person who enjoyed it was Anne she thought it wonderful fun and went on chattering all the time and wanted to go and see everything, and as soon as the first shock was over she was bustling hither and thither feeling terribly important and excited. I just sat on the steps and waited for Daddy, who came back eventually without either his jeep or his shoes, both having got stuck in the mud! It went on rocking in spasms but Daddy persuaded us to go into bed, however after having sprung out of bed about 6 times I dragged a mattress out onto the lawn and Anne and I slept on that – or rather lay on it, we neither of us slept! It was the oddest feeling being rocked up and down by nothing so to speak, but quite pleasant when you knew there was nothing to fall on you.*

*The next two days, Wednesday and Thursday, were horrible, as it poured with rain and was very dark and oppressive and there were shakes every couple of hours which made you feel very jumpy and slightly sick. Actually we were lucky here, most other bungalows had plaster down all over the place and some had chimneys, here there was nothing except a crack or two.*

*On Friday we went into Nazira where the river had flooded and was seeping up all over the polo ground, and on Saturday evening Anne and I started feeling coldy and miserable and were both in bed with 'flu on Sunday. To-day is Wednesday and I am feeling better for the first time since then, so altogether it has been a horrid time. The weather hasn't helped. It has rained almost without stopping since the quake and been very dark and gloomy and we still get shakes about twice a day and night – it seems as if everything has gone wrong and queer suddenly and I wish it would get back to normal. I felt awful with the 'flu until this morning, and Anne was streaming and coughing next to me poor wee thing, but didn't seem*

*to feel ill and kept cheerful. I hope Daddy doesn't catch it. The paper has just arrived, the first we have had for a week, and we seem to have got away very lightly considering we are right in the middle of the worst area (back to the earthquake again, its all we can think or talk about at the moment!).*

*I do hope I hear from you all soon, the last letter I got was when you had just arrived at Corydon Lodge!<sup>32</sup> Please tell Granpa I'm sorry I forgot his birthday, actually I didn't forget but was feeling my worst when I should have written. I hope he had a nice day for it. I'm afraid this is a very gloomy letter, actually the worst is over now, but I don't feel absolutely right yet so won't write any more for now. I will end a more cheerful letter in a few days. Lots of love to you all, darlings, Mummy.*

Anne and Iris travelled from India on the 'Himalaya' arriving on 18th November 1950, remaining in England until January 1952.

Meanwhile, Donald was moved from Mackeypore T.E. as acting manager of Tingaliban T.E. ".... on probation for six months with effect from 19th November [1950]...."

Donald left on home leave 25th June 1951. "Mr D.H.G. Condoover moved to Tingalibam on the 14th instant, which will allow him to spend a few days with Mr Macfarlane before the later goes on leave"

December 25th 1951 Confirmation of appointment as managers – Mr D.K. Macfarlane and Mr. D.D. Mowatt<sup>33</sup>. "I have been very satisfied with the way in which both Mr. Macfarlane and Mr. Mowatt have carried out their duties since they were appointed to managements at Tingalibam and Suntok respectively and I have pleasure in recommending that these appointments be confirmed".



1952

Fiona and Anne returned to India with Iris and Donald, leaving me on my own in England, at the Dragon School, Oxford. They left on 22nd January 1952 on the 'Chusan'.

[Iris to Alan]

*[first page missing]....The girls come up on deck and they play around till 11.30 when they have their lunch! After lunch I give them an hours lessons in a quiet corner and at 1.30 we have our lunch. They don't have another meal until 5.30 in the evening so are ravenous by that time, and sit down to soup, meat and savoury or pudding. They go to bed early as they are rushing around all day long. There are simply masses of children on board and they've made friends with a little boy called Howard and chase each other up and downstairs indefinitely.*

*They have quite a lot of things organised for the children and yesterday was their Fancy Dress Party, Fiona went as a fairy and Anne as an elf, Daddy and I had an awful time cutting stars out of silver paper and making wire wings but in the end I was helping someone else and Fiona didn't arrive in time for the judging. Still they enjoyed themselves and ended up with a large tea with crackers and balloons. The swimming pool is open now and they're in it at the moment with Daddy, we're in the Red Sea and its HOT – can you believe that? We reach Aden to-night, but too late for the children to get off I'm afraid, about midnight I think. We have stopped twice so far, once at Ceuta in Spanish Morocco (on the north Coast of Africa) where I got these stamps and once at Port Said where we weren't allowed to get off and lots of English soldiers came on board with guns.*

*We also had to anchor in the Suez Canal for quite a long time and saw some jeeps and armoured cars but not much else. We were quite close to Ismailia where the fighting is<sup>34</sup> and thought we might hear a shot or two but not a hope!*

*We haven't seen any flying fish or sharks or anything else so really its been quite a dull voyage. We got off the boat at Ceuta and bought a couple of Spanish combs for the girls from some Spaniards who set up stalls on the quay-side, they were selling lovely shawls and bracelets too but far too expensive.*

*I think I had better finish this letter now as I don't know what time they get posted, and I don't want to miss it. The girls send their love, and Daddy and I send lots – it won't be long before we see you again we're planning it already  
Lots of love, Mummy*

[Iris to Alan, from Calcutta, early February 1952]

*Darling Alan,*

*This is just a short letter from Calcutta before we start our last flight up to Assam to-morrow. We had to be up at 4 this morning so you can imagine I feel pretty tired, actually I haven't had much sleep since we were at Aden nearly a week ago as Anne hasn't been very well and keeping us awake every night with earache. I was so glad to get your letter at Aden and hear you were having fun with the snow, it seems funny to think of snow when here its hot and we are wearing only a cotton dress each.*

*Fiona doesn't care for India very much so far, she is horrified to find it so hot and smelly and dirty. I took them for a stroll this evening and she thought it dreadful to see people sitting all over the pavements and road, spitting! We arrived at Bombay at mid-day yesterday but had an awful time getting through the customs and didn't get to our hotel for lunch till*

2.30 pm! I wasn't really sorry to leave the boat as there was a lot of sickness about with 250 children on board!

We flew over to Calcutta this morning, six hours non-stop which is a long flight and Fiona decided she didn't like that either – it was hot and she got bored, especially as the rest of us slept most of the time! Her ears ached when we came down and she was thoroughly fed up, but brightened up after some lunch. She isn't looking forward to the flight to-morrow though I hope you won't feel like that about flying, it is rather boring after a bit, but if you bring plenty to read, and sleep as much as you can, the time passes quite quickly. I shall be glad when our travelling is over and we can settle down and sort ourselves out again. The muddle we are getting into is something horrible!

Well darling I must get the girls to bed, I'll write again as soon as we're settled. Let me, or Granny, know if theres anything you want won't you, and mind you keep that diary up,<sup>35</sup> I shall want to know everything.

Lots of love from us all, Fiona wishes she was you I'm sure, I think she regrets coming now!

Love and kisses - Mummy

Assam Co., Nazira. February 12th 1952: Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane and family arrived at Tingalibam on the 7th instant on their return from home leave and Mr. Macfarlane took over charge of the garden from Mr. Condoover on the 9th instant.

Iris to Alan on Assam Company notepaper from Tingalibam, 3rd March 1952

Darling Alan,

Thank you for your letter this week, but we were sorry to hear you'd been in bed a week, was it your cold or something else? I hope you're quite alright now and getting some hockey, jolly good being in the seventh game. I wonder if you've been out at all this term, it is sad that Granny is so far away but you'll have to make friends with a day boy and get out that way! Did you do anything special at half term or were you in bed for that too? We have had our troubles here, as Fiona had one of her really good bilious attacks the other day and felt very miserable and fed on salt and water for a couple of days. She got up still feeling washed out, but is alright again now touch wood. The result is that our lessons have got a bit behind but they couldn't care less of course. The first enthusiasm for school has rather worn off I fear and I'm wondering how things will go when it really gets hot, the trouble is that Anne likes one kind of lesson and Fiona another so one of them is always bored. Still we shall plod on and hope they don't get too far behind. I am learning an awful lot anyway.<sup>36</sup>

We had an awful tragedy to-day, the children were given two tiny rabbits a couple of days ago and were playing with them on the lawn this morning when the cat crept up and pounced on one of them. It was Fiona's, the smallest of the two, the sweetest little white bundle of fur with pink eyes, and that was that. Fiona was frightfully upset of course and I was nearly sick on the spot, because Daddy and I were upstairs and could see what was going to happen but couldn't get down quick enough. We are going to get another to replace it, but even so it was a horrible thing to happen and Fiona will never forget it I'm sure. We're hoping to be leant a pony any day now, so are gradually collecting a menagerie as I thought we would.

Are you going to get your white mice next holidays? I hope you'll like your riding lessons, you'll get some riding here so mind you learn quickly! We've just bought a new wireless and can get programmes direct from England, it makes us very homesick to hear "Rays a Laugh" and "Take it from here" but its nice to feel we can be in touch with home, though how it crosses all those seas and hills and comes to us at the turn of a switch beats me.

*The dear old Humber hasn't arrived yet,<sup>37</sup> and we don't expect it for another two months as it comes out on a cargo boat and then has to get here by river steamer, but we're lucky to have a Land Rover on the garden and can go into the club in that. We are having a drought here, or rather we were until yesterday when the skies opened and it poured from morning till night, and to-day we've had another good soak. But before that there had been nothing for ages and all the water tanks have dried up so we get nothing running out of taps and have to drag it miles from various streams and ponds – we often find tadpoles in the water we're washing our hands in which makes life quite exciting. Anne was wondering if we couldn't manage a salmon for you but I hope the water crisis will be over by then I must admit.*

*Daddy has been writing about your air passage, friends of ours on a nearby garden are flying their son out for Christmas too so it might be fun if you came together. We're hoping to make a small swimming pool during the summer, Fiona was beginning to swim on the boat and could do half a dozen stroke or so before she finally drank so much water that she sank – and if you get a decent summer you should be flashing around in no time.*

*I'm enclosing what is supposed to be a painting of the bungalow done from one end, I'm afraid you won't be able to make out much from it but I'll try to do a better one next time. We go up some stairs on the right of the car and they land us on the verandah above with the rails running all round it. This verandah is about 6 foot wide and runs the whole length of the bungalow and all the rooms lead off it. Daddy could have done a much better painting but was too lazy. We take rugs out on Sunday afternoons and read and paint in the shade of the bamboos, and watch the comings and goings of two owls that live in a tree nearby.*

*Well darling it's late and I still have Fiona's and Anne's lessons to prepare for to-morrow so I'll end this. Fiona wrote the enclosed on my typewriter, Anne wrote one too but it said bat, hat, pin? Fgmlnvojkorum – j so I didn't bother to send it! Lots of love from us all, Mummy x x x x*

Iris at Tingalibam to Alan 29th March 1952

*Darling Alan,*

*I've been thinking of you just home for the hols, but feeling very sorry for you all back in the middle of winter again, we've just listened to the boat race and were horrified to hear that there were blizzards of snow and it was bitterly cold again, I do hope Broadstone has missed the worst of it. We were thrilled to hear Oxford winning the boat race at last, perhaps you'll get an extra days holiday on the strength of it!*

*We're having the most peculiar weather here too, a series of storms that I don't terribly like as they are so violent and we haven't got our lightning conductor yet – as Daddy points out this bungalow has been standing for donkeys years without a lightning conductor but I am quite convinced the time has now come for it to be burnt down! The storms keep it cool and I've lighted a fire again to-night which is pretty good for this time of year, the wet weather has also brought the leeches out and we have only to stand in the grass for a couple of minutes for three or four of them to come looping furiously towards us, we've all had to pick several off and don't like them a bit. I can stand most kinds of creepy crawlies, but snakes and leeches no. Haven't seen a snake yet touch wood, but the wet brings them out too.*

*Our farmyard is progressing alright, all eight chicks still alive but the one that we took out of the egg looks a bit weedy and will probably die. We let them out in the sun for most of the day now with an old crone in attendance to ward off the crows, kites and cats that are ready to pounce, Daddy is promising me a proper run for them but there are fifty million other things to be done first.*

*I've been out riding three times this week and think I have got the hang of the horse, she bounces and prances a bit when she wants to get home but in actual fact does nothing else, I*

took her out on Monday saying to myself that this was finally the last time unless I enjoyed it, and that I would let her gallop part of the way home to see if I could stop her, I had to use both hands but managed it and I think we understand each other now. The girls are still bouncing about on their pony, I shall be interested to hear if you learn to ride properly before they do, I expect you will because I can't often be bothered to go with them and explain. Anyway it's a difficult thing to explain, it seems to just happen like riding a bicycle. Anne is trying to ride the bicycle that Fiona has been lent and demands to be pushed round and round the lawn at the hottest time of the day.

This morning we took them over to the factory with their bikes and they had a wonderful time tearing round and round between the pillars and machines and generally breaking the place up.

Tea is being plucked now, just beginning, so the factory has started and the girls were most amused to watch the process of making tea. I'm afraid you won't see it as the bushes are pruned right back in the winter and aren't ready to be plucked again till now. But you used to see it a lot at Mohokutie so perhaps you remember. Yesterday we drove to Nazira in the afternoon for Daddy to play tennis, the girls swam for a short time but as I have lost my costume and couldn't be on hand to rescue them, they couldn't do very much.

School is going on and on. I'm beginning to wonder if they are really learning anything but Daddy thinks they are, Anne can certainly read short words now but the other child, S. W., is incredibly dim and spends most of the morning yawning in my face which I find a bit discouraging. I was giving them a Bible lesson the other day about Abraham, and how God spoke to him from a cloud, and I explained that God didn't speak to us like that nowadays, he spoke inside us. They were duly impressed and a few days later when Anne's tummy rumbled very loudly she turned to me excitedly and said "Oh listen, is that God speaking?" !

I've just made them a couple of dolls out of old towels with bamboo legs and arms and wool hair and they're thrilled to bits and Anne even offered to give her rubber doll away as being no further use, just shows what a waste of money it is getting you creatures expensive presents! I wonder if you manage your electric train on your own and if you will add anything to it this hols. Granny has put your Christmas money into saving certificates £3 I think it was. I feel sad not being there while you are on holiday, it isn't so bad in the term, but still I'm glad you're not out here at this time of year, there isn't very much to do, you wouldn't like it.

Fiona's birthday in a couple of days looks like being a bit of a flop, we can't get the elephant that we thought we should be able to, and now I hear that the puppy is not going to be ready either so we shan't even have a present for her, there's no question of just popping down to the shops for something here! Poor Fiona, but it can't be helped. We're having all the local children to tea and there'll be 11 of them altogether but all ages and I know I shan't be able to organise them into doing anything sensible. At least I don't have to make the cakes, that's one comfort.

Oh dear, here comes the thunder and lightning again, just when you think it's gone it turns round and comes back again, Granny certainly wouldn't enjoy Assam much. Will you tell her that I'll be writing in a couple of days, Fiona was very pleased with her and Nutty's<sup>38</sup> letters and I'm enclosing an answer from them, she wrote it without any help with spelling, I give her dictation lessons every week which seem to be having a little effect although she went a bit haywire over "dahlias" !

The thunder and lightning turned suddenly to a sort of cyclone and then the most terrific hailstorm I've ever been in, stones the size of small bricks just falling in a solid wall onto the roof, absolutely deafening, I staggered to the children's room and the garden was bright purple in a continual sheet of lightning and what with the wind and thunder too it has been a harassing ten minutes. Daddy is out of course, he will be very worried about his precious tea



*because a hailstorm at this time of year can just strip off all the tender new shoots. One of the servants is busy just now sweeping up the sooty hail that fell down the chimney.*

*After which I think I'll got to bed, I hope Daddy has avoided it!*

*Lots of love darling from all - Mummy*

Iris at Tingalibam to Alan, 4th August 1952

*Darling Alan,*

*You will be at camp now,<sup>39</sup> but I don't know the address I'm afraid. I do hope you're enjoying it and getting decent enough weather to bathe, it sounds as if the summer has been pretty dismal up to now. You can have all the sunshine you want from here, we're sick of it! We haven't had any rain for a week and everything is parched and dusty and it's jolly hot – but we can't grumble as its not been too bad up to now.*

*We went to spend the week-end with the Werners<sup>40</sup> (do you remember them?) near Moran, its about 1 and a half hours away and a very dusty drive and Fiona was convinced she was nearly dead with thirst by the time we got there, she was asking me towards the end if her tongue was black and swollen! They live at a Tea Garden called Khoomtaie which is about the best in the Company, lovely bungalow, swimming pool etc. It made poor old Tingalibam look very shabby in comparison. The bungalow (Khoomtaie) was struck by lightning a few weeks ago, it was terrifying apparently, the whole place went white and the noise was like a bomb dropping – the roof caught fire, but they managed to put it out quite quickly. Of course Anne was horrified as she's inclined to be scared of lightning but we've always assured her that it never strikes bungalows! We enjoyed swimming in their pool which is much bigger than ours, but got very burnt in the process – Anne and their small boy Charles played together and Fiona spent the week-end with her nose buried in books!*

*We had to swap Anne's pony Algernon for another quieter one as he was too frisky and threw her several times and also bit her when he got the chance, she has now got a white one called Pegasus who is so old and bony he can hardly put one foot in front of the other, and she is rather bored with him, but we hope he'll improve with feeding. The girls' passion at the moment is dressing-up, they rig themselves out in masses of old clothes and have "dances" in the schoolroom, I couldn't think of a hotter pastime! We have Elizabeth<sup>41</sup> coming to stay again from Sunday – I don't altogether look forward to it as she's so terribly noisy, but its very lonely for the girls here now.*

*We had a film at the club yesterday called "The Half Breed" which was all about Red Indians and the wild west and villains were rolled over the edges of precipices and horses tore about in clouds of dust (in Technicolour) – it was rather fun. I wished I'd kept the girls up for it. We have one or two good ones coming which they'll enjoy including "Where No Vultures Fly" again.*

*Well darling that seems about the lot for this week, I am looking forward to hearing about the camp and what you do and if its fun, and of course about Pat and the Cowans generally so get down with that pen and paper won't you?!*

*With lots of love from us all - Mummy x x x x*

*P.s. Jolly good winning the high jump and relay race.*

Iris at Tingalibam to Alan, 26th August 1952

*Darling Alan,*

*You'll be with the Cowans by now, but I don't know their address so I hope this will catch up with you. I'm longing to hear how you're getting on and what that part of Scotland is like,*

*do you like it as much as the West Coast? I suppose you will find a big change in the Cowan children, especially Richard. Have you caught any fish?*

*Daddy and I broke away last week-end, dumped the girls and went off to stay with a friend on the other side of Nazira. He was giving a big party on the Saturday night and we arrived just in time for it. It went on till 4 a.m! We enjoyed it very much but I wasn't feeling too good as I had the beginnings of a cold, sore throat and headache, however I took lots of aspirin and washed them down with champagne which is about the best way of taking aspirin I know! On Sunday I felt even worse and was jolly glad to get back to my own bed that evening and I have been there ever since. I got up this morning which is Thursday, I haven't felt so bad with a cold for years, and though I often long to lounge in bed, when I get the chance I hate it. My chicks hatched out on Monday, 7 out of 11 which wasn't very good, and I've been fretting terribly that they've not been properly looked after – one died this morning so I'm wondering how many more will follow as a result of not getting proper attention from me!*

*The girls enjoyed their week-end as on both afternoons they were taken to see a troop of performing elephants which are being trained near here for a circus. I think I told you. Apparently this circus has toured all the way from Hong Kong, via the Philippines and Burma and is next going to Australia, then America and finally England. There are 12 elephants and Fiona and Anne have been demonstrating on all available stools and sofas, the sort of tricks they were teaching them, they've even tried getting Candy<sup>42</sup> to stand on her hands on a cushion, but without the slightest success! There was one elephant called Sonny who did everything wrong, apparently, stood on his hind legs when the others were on their front, and overbalanced into the bargain but the girls thought he was "too sweet"! I'm hoping to see them myself soon and can tell you more about them and then I hope we'll see the circus itself.*

*Your school report arrived this week – good on the whole, especially French, Cricket and Swimming – some subjects could be improved upon but I daresay you know them! It didn't say whether you were changing house or not. Fiona does her exams in a week's time and then we have two weeks holiday which we all deserve I think and then another term till mid-December. After that a long long holiday during which they'll forget everything they ever learnt!*

*I'm sitting on the verandah looking out over our pond, we put 1 water-lily 2 months ago and now the whole pond (about 40 yds long) is covered with flat leaves and long pink blossoms it looks lovely, specially now when it is framed with a rainbow. [rest missing]*

Alan to Iris and Donald 7th December 1952, from the Dragon School, Oxford

*Dear Mummy and Daddy, I am very sorry I did not write last week but I did not get an air letter and so I could not write. There are only 9 days until the end of term so I will probably arrive about a week after this. We have had skating most of this week and I have just got the knack I skated about 3 miles yesterday with only a few small stops. I can go about the speed of me trotting. We had a film last week called the Eureka Stockade it was about a Gold Mining village where a man called bently<sup>43</sup> was accused of murder and a mob burnt down his house and the police were fining them £2 a month for the land and the miners made a blockade but the police attacked and beat the miners but the leader managed to get away and they got a doctor and the doctor had to do something that hurt terribly and to drown the noise of the man they sang adeste fideles and it all ended happily, lots of love Alan*

My parents had arranged for me to spend Christmas in Assam with them and my sisters. My grandmother took me to London on 16th December and I flew to India on the 17th. I sent a postcard from Calcutta to my grandmother of the aircraft I flew in.

*Dear Granny this is the Argonaut I am flying in it is very comfortable and we get wonderful food. We are about 2 hours travelling and I have not been sick we got a shower bath at Karachi and I am feeling nice and cool lots of love Alan*



Anne, Donald, Iris (holding Mopsy, Candy in the foreground), Fiona and their Ayah in front of the Tingalibam bungalow, Christmas 1952



Alan (holding Mopsy), Fiona (holding Candy), Ayah and Anne



Alan with Naga spear, Anne on left, at Tingalibam



## 1953

POSTCARD from Alan on a B.O.A.C. Comet<sup>44</sup> to Iris at Tingalibam [franked 17th January 1953 in Italy]

*Dear Mummy and Daddy, I am nearly at rome I have had a nice journey so far I am sending another Postcard when I get to school and I am sending two Broaches. I hope that everything is going well and Mopsy is getting on. Lots of love alan*

Alan to Iris and Donald, 18th January 1953

*Dear Mummy and daddy,*

*My new years resolution is to write 2 letters a week. I hope you got my post card. I am afraid I could not send the other one because granny has got it. I am afraid I won't be able to send the photos for a bit because granny had got my Camera but I am going to finish the reel off when granny comes down to see me. I wonder how mospy is getting on and candy too. We arrived two hours late but I enjoyed the flight very much. Me and Granny saw the naga spear and the porter said "I am afraid it will not get into this bus so he was going to put it into the second one but when it arrived they could not find it. Granny thinks it went down the back of the luggage thing and noone looked there. It might have turned up by now but it soon will if it hasn't. I am in the same form and dorm but I have moved up to 4th from 6th in soccer. I saw some saber jet fighters at rome. I nearly went to the CRIMZON PIRATE again but there was not time so I went to a news theatre. I hope you are well and everything is going well. Lots of love Alan*

Iris at Tingalibam, 24th April 1953

*Darling Alan,*

*No letter from you this week, perhaps you've been too busy! I suppose you're beginning to think of the end of the hols now, depressing thought, but the summer term is the best really isn't it? The girls are just dying to come home and I think Fiona is longing to be back at school again, but they bear up pretty well and get the most out of life here. They are getting quite efficient riders and go careering about, chasing cows and goats, they would both fall off if the horses took a step sideways as they really haven't much idea of how to sit properly but they don't seem to mind being thrown from side to side. Anne usually takes a firm grip of the back of the saddle when they get into a canter and Fiona grasps any bit of the horse she can get a hold of, very unorthodox but it keeps them on.*

*I have had a very depressing week and I know you will be very sad to hear that Mopsy died yesterday. She got better, but then got worse again and we tried everything but could not save her. I was heartbroken but am trying to take a sensible view of it now, we would have had to have left her next year and she might have got ill then and wouldn't have got all the attention I could give her, also she didn't like the heat at all and would have been very uncomfortable when it got really hot, so perhaps she is happier now in the Happy Hunting Grounds. I like to think so.*

*I haven't been out anywhere this week, except for an hour on Sunday morning when we took the girls up the Kanu river, it is just right now, deep enough for them to swim in places but not to drown in. We waded up quite a long way, Daddy and I trying to catch butterflies*

*without much success although some lovely one flitted past on the other side of the river, always. We did catch a Bluebottle but all the colour got rubbed off by the time we got home, I'm putting it in for you to look at.*

*The swimming pool has been amusing the girls a lot but a large toad took possession of it a couple of days ago and scared Anne who has refused to go in since. We are cleaning it out and putting in a pump and sinking a tube well so the water will be cleaner and then we are going to put in some lime to make it blue which will also keep out the toads I hope. It still isn't too hot as we've had quite a bit of rain and on Wednesday night we had a sort of cyclone, it blew up quite suddenly with a sort of screaming noise and there were cracks and crashes all round as trees fell down, one of them just missed the bungalow and fused the lights so we were left in the pitch dark, it was quite terrifying for about five minutes, although I don't know quite what we expected to happen. There was a fair amount of havoc next morning, but luckily the wind had moved in a path through the garden so only one strip was badly damaged, trees had been uprooted taking about ten tea bushes with them and one lot of coolie houses had all their roofs removed, they must have had a really terrifying night. I don't know what's happened to the weather these days, it always seems to be doing something queer.*

*I wonder what sort you've had for your hols, have you seen anything of the Deanes?<sup>45</sup>*

*On Saturday the girls went to the club and someone was trying to sell a tiger cub, they wanted Rs 400 for it, if it had been cheap I would have taken it, although I daresay it would have been a frightful nuisance when it started mauling everybody! It sat on Anne's lap and she fed it from a bottle apparently, I wish Daddy had had his Cine there.*

*There doesn't seem any more news this week darling. I haven't been out anywhere or done anything. We listened to the Football International between Scotland and England on Saturday, terrific excitement when Scotland scored that last goal! Wonder if you'll see the Australians.<sup>46</sup> Much love from us all darling –  
Mummy x x x*

*Iris at Tingalibam, 5th June 1953*

*Darling Alan,*

*So the excitement is over,<sup>47</sup> and everything back to normal again I suppose – here we haven't felt it the same way but we managed to get all the commentaries on the wireless, not the same as Television which must have been wonderful. I couldn't get the girls to raise much enthusiasm, they didn't even bother to listen to the wireless for more than a few minutes, a pity but we are so out of touch here that it's difficult to convey what it was all about. They were more excited about Everest which was closer to hand, and I must say we were thrilled about that too.<sup>48</sup> Then there was Anne's birthday on Wednesday (she was very pleased to get your card and letter and is writing, she has started several letters but they have all faded out). So it has been a busy week all round.*

*We gave Anne some gramophone records and a bracelet with silver charms all round it, Fiona a bag and some cheap bracelets and I got her a book from you, she got a fountain pen from the Wallaces and still has a couple of presents to arrive so did quite well. We also ordered some films to show on our projector they didn't arrive in time needless to say, they came yesterday and we showed them last night but were most disappointed, they were frightfully old, one of them was a Charlie Chaplin and kept breaking, the others were "Terry Toons" and pretty feeble but the kids weren't too critical.*

*We have had a busy time with a new addition to our menagerie, a baby Civit cat or Mongoose, we are not quite sure which at the moment. It was brought in from the garden about a week ago, a teeny object the size of a kitten which sat quite comfortably in one hand.*

*I didn't think it would live, but spooned milk down it at intervals and to my surprise it is still going strong and growing very sweet and playful, I now feed it from a bottle and it stands up on its hind legs and grasps the bottle with its front paws and sucks furiously, but I am trying to get it to lap as it's a bit of a business carting it round with me wherever I go, we had to take it up to Borpatra<sup>49</sup> yesterday as we were going up for the day, and will take it to the club this afternoon as we'll be staying late for the film. We have called it Rickie in the hopes it will be a mongoose, it has the markings of a civet cat but Mrs Rigby,<sup>50</sup> who has kept several mongooses says she is sure it is one so we're hoping for the best. I somehow cant see us with a full grown Civet cat wandering round and don't see any future for my poultry if it is one. I will try and draw you a picture of it but don't suppose I shall be very successful, it has a thick soft fur coat, paler underneath, with black spots on its sides, black lines running down its back and a black-ringed tail. The Edyes<sup>51</sup> have a mongoose and I must say they are not very alike, but theirs is one of the ordinary brown kind, a nasty looking little thing which bites, not a patch on Ricky.*

*We went up yesterday to take Elizabeth back, she had been staying with us for a week and I think enjoyed herself very much as she didn't seem very keen to go home. We liked having her but find life very peaceful now, she has a voice like a foghorn and never stopped using it, not to mention a laugh like a hyena, she and Anne got on very well and spent the time screaming incessantly which we found a bit wearing. She adored riding, and went galloping madly round, and I didn't realise till afterwards that she had never ridden before except at a slow walk on the end of a piece of string. Ginger, Fiona's pony, refuses to budge an inch now so they both ride the other one, they tried playing polo on him to-day.*

*We are drawing to the end of our term now, two more weeks and then some exams and then two weeks holiday during which I hope to have Anne's tonsils out. We are going to try and give a couple of small plays at the end of term but I don't know if S. will ever learn his words, he is incredibly dim. He is going home in a months time and we shall then be able to get on with some serious work. It's going to be awfully lonely for the girls though, until the other children come down from school in the Autumn. We haven't got any new butterflies, it has been very wet this last week with big storms, we got caught in one coming back from Borpatra yesterday and it was quite frightening, we were in the Land Rover fortunately, but had no doors and the rain just lashed down, Fiona and I crouched with a towel round us in the front seat.*

*That seems about the lot darling, no letter from you this week, hope all is well, I expect there was too much going on. Send us the pictures of the Coronation if they come out.<sup>52</sup>*

*Lots and lots of love,*

*Mummy x x x x*

*Iris to Alan, Tingalibam, 13th August 1953*

*Darling Alan,*

*My typewriter has just about "had" it but here goes anyway. No letter from you yet these hols, but I know you've been very busy one way and another! We got your report last week, very good, Daddy and I were thrilled and Daddy promises me he is going to write to you about it to-morrow. Jolly good show. I'm so sorry that this tooth business has cropped up, and do hope you wont hate having it done, it shouldn't take more than a couple of days but I hope doesn't interfere with any of your holiday plans. Granny said you were enjoying Swanage<sup>53</sup> and getting good weather, hope its kept up, the Wallaces<sup>54</sup> have arrived there now so you may bump into them one day.*

*Here we are struggling along, beginning to count the days till the cold weather, August is about the worst month I think, very hot and one is getting tired of it. We went to Borpatra last*

*week-end to stay with the Edyes and collect Elizabeth, poor Mrs Edye had to leave after lunch on Sunday to have her tonsils out, as she is nearly fifty it must have been perfectly beastly especially in this heat. We've since heard that she is alright, but also that there was a minor hurricane at Panitola where the hospital is,<sup>55</sup> rooves blown off and railway lines ripped up which must have been just the last straw. We saw their baby whistlers,<sup>56</sup> only two survived out of the ten that hatched but they were terribly sweet. The mongoose has gone wild and lives outside and we didn't catch sight of him though Celia said he often came out to pass the time of day.*

*We collected Elizabeth at tea time and since they had a rowdy re-union which has gone on ever since, she is the noisiest creature I've ever met and I spend my time trying to get out of the sound of her voice which is like a fog horn and never stops. She and Anne are great buddies but Fiona is inclined to be superior, she has built herself a wigwam down the other end of the pokrie<sup>57</sup> where she sits a good deal of the time talking to herself and catching minute fish in the butterfly net which she sells to the other two.*

*To-day is Independence Day and a holiday,<sup>58</sup> at 7.30 this morning there was a ceremony of pulling up the Indian Flag and saluting it, Daddy had to do the pulling but there were only two men and a boy there to do the saluting! After breakfast there were sports which were a bit better patronised, we went to watch the first few events but by half past nine it was too hot to stay out any longer and it made me feel a lot hotter to see them all panting round in it.*

*Fiona and I went out to see a Mrs Cooper<sup>59</sup> after that who has come to live in the Rosses<sup>60</sup> bungalow and is also a hairdresser very fortunately, she cut Fiona's hair this morning and has made her look quite different, very pretty, I'm getting her to do mine next with the same result I hope!*

*After tea we had to go and present the prizes for the sports, there was a bit of speech making first and some band-playing, rather like Christmas day, and then I had to give out cakes of soap and dirty looking mirrors to a lot of even dirtier looking kids, who were thrilled with them of course. Then to round off the day the flag was supposed to be ceremoniously pulled down, but this was a bit of a flop as it stuck and refused to budge, even when all the bits of string were broken. Altogether a rather exhausting day in this weather.*

*To-day is the next day actually, and even hotter if anything. I hate Sundays in the rains as I think I've mentioned before. I got an urge to "do" my butterflies this morning and pinned two lots onto white boards and they look most effective stuck up on the mantelpiece, we are going to make a shelf for them all round the room. While we were doing this Mrs Rigby arrived with her school-boy son<sup>61</sup> who has just flown out from home (he is at Haileybury) his parents didn't hear of his trip until the day he arrived. He is also very keen on butterflies so I was able to show him mine though he has a much better lot, a lot of them bought ones. It made us sad we hadn't got you out here too, but I don't think you would care for Assam a bit just now, we don't.*

*Daddy is going to enclose a line he assures me so I'll call a halt. Do hope the tooth episode is over now darling, and wasn't too horrid. Looking forward to hearing from you! Lots of love to all, Mummy x x x*

[Iris kept a couple of notebooks in which she wrote occasional pieces. All are dated though do not read like a diary. They may have been written as exercises in writing, perhaps with a view to using later in a book.]

Notebook: October 10th 1953. The days drifting past in a flowering of bougainvillea, scarlet flame & purple. Dew on dahlias and cabbage leaves, wood smoke from the stable fire, mixing with manure & cut grass. Brown eggs and radishes. The children eating oranges (always) rubbing rosy faces against their horses necks, racing the goat's across the lawn,

making felt needle cases with much-sucked bits of silk, working at a table dappled with sun & butterflies wings, lifting their heads as a golden oriole swoops & jerks across the lawn or to watch a woodpecker in the Japanese bamboos. ("Mummy do you know where it gets its red crest?" No tell me later". "It's a Red Indian story—" "Tell me later – with great strength of mind.)

Vicky [a monkey]. Spider armed, sad faced with hooded eyes and sweeping eyelashes, long, delicate, pointed fingers that pry with infinity delicacy at the tiny crumbs and spots of wool, the beautiful thumb-nail guiding the speck towards the four fingers, the vague inspection from the liquid eyes, the trial with the tongue tip, before the speck is released and the arm wanders up to scratch the back of the neck while the black-amber eyes shift round for something else to interest them. The tantrums when we put her in her box at night, feet & arms kicking furiously against the wire, screaming mouth turned down, until she suddenly decides we are serious & slumps curled up in a corner with her head pillowed on her arms, her eyes rolling accusingly, infinitely pathetic as always. Her voice of pleasure is something between a grunt and a yawn, the tail-end of a belch, but she makes this noise also in moments of alarm, her normal noise is simple a series of squeaks demanding food & love, but eventually I hope she will call the echoing of Walkie Talkie" of hooluks in the jungle, a strangely exultant hooting that will carry for miles, bringing the primitive joy of freedom to leap & swing & dive & clatter among the branches which Vicky will perhaps feel, albeit in a solitary way, among our bamboo clumps. She likes butterflies to eat & fruit of any kind, milk or tea or orange juice, and is very partial to bread & syrrup. She is a pernickety feeder, coring and pipping her fruit, de-winging her butterflies with the gentle precision of her amazing pointed fingers, chewing with a faraway expression in her eyes as if to make it clear that though the body must be satisfied the mind is on higher things. She loves to tease the dog, and after some suspicion Candy has now accepted her as a playmate. She is very gentle, although Vicky's technique is "poke & skuttle" with an occasional pull of the tail in passing. When I was in bed she very quickly sized up that I was static and sat on my chest all day, removed at intervals but padding back down the passage five minutes later. She was most disappointed next day to find me up, & kept standing on her hind legs and peering over the edge of my bed expectantly.

## 1954

Notebook: January 1st 1954. A moment for ponderous reflections on past & future, but to-day has been the same as any other, & with my back against a palm tree I am dazed by a crimson bougainvillea that is swaying a few feet from my nose, and by the smell of mimosa from the little tree we planted last year which has its first dusting of golden balls. The walls of the terrace are bursting through the cracks with purple satin petunias, & frothing with moss verbena and nasturtiums & phlox & michaelmas daisies, and the ducks & geese are slapping about in the pond. The afternoon is set in its groove and I shall always find it here at this time under this tree, and capture if I can the peace & colour and the bird's wings. This tree, set out in the middle of the lawn, is a rendezvous for all the garden birds, they land with a clatter in the dry palm leaves and wrangle and rustle above me and then fly off purposely – wide winged blue jays, bossy mynahs, pigeons, wagtails & many others. To-day we saw minarets, two scarlet & two yellow – like candles in the dark green branches.

Continue Exams this morning – Fiona describing the Habeas Corpus Act & How an Electric Bell Rings – surely a bit much to expect of a 9 year old? Anne had very little success in the instructions as to how the Passover should be kept, muddling it inextricably with the Last Supper, but more with Christians on the Hill Difficulty. I find the whole business most wearing, willing them to know the answers, torn between rage & pity when they don't, & communicate my nervous exhaustion to them so that by the end of the morning we are all wrecks. They took their goats out for a picnic this afternoon, part of a strengthening programme which also involves feeding the wretched animals on dried beans "puddings" & keeping them shut up during the heat of the day – the goats take exception to the whole treatment and look a little jaded.

Went over yesterday to see my neighbour Mrs M– & in spite of half-hearted attempts to keep off the subject we ended by the usual abortive discussion on what is wrong with everyone in the district. After a lot of tea & platitudes ("Well, I suppose one must take people as one finds them." "I suppose everyone has their good points but I must say I can't see hers", "I can forgive most things but sheer downright rudeness – no!") I returned, flushed with sherry, along the dusky jungle roads to the same world of children on the hearthrug. If only one could fence oneself off utterly, how uncomplicated life out here would be.

Iris to Alan, from Tingalibam, 4th January 1954

*Darling Alan,*

*No letter from you yet these holidays – but maybe it's the Christmas rush in the post offices! My last letter took a month to reach Granny, so I hope you have been hearing from me. I do wonder where you are and when you are going back to Granny. I don't even know when you go back to school actually.*

*Here we're still doing Exams, isn't it an awful thought – but they should be over in a day or two and then we shall have 6 weeks in the clear. By the end of it the girls are thoroughly bored and ready to start again. They haven't minded their Exams too much, though Anne got a bit hysterical over deltas and isthmuses and what-not. Fiona's spelling is still pretty awful and she seems to have the family complex about the word "WHICH"! We've had a quiet week, writing "thank-you" letters (with fearful groans) and doing exams and in the afternoons the goats have been taken for long strengthening walks – at least it's their (girls) idea that it's good for the wretched animals but actually they look quite worn out! I was persuaded to go with them this afternoon, we tramped and stumbled over the rice fields*



*which you may remember are very lumpy and bristly – it was hot and the goats ropes kept getting wound round our legs and tripping us up and there was a tremendous amount of bleating and shouting while we all sorted ourselves out. In between these skirmishes one or other goat was galloping after Candy who ran screaming behind me so that I got the butting that was intended for her – not a restful afternoon stroll and my last goat-strengthening expedition for a long time. Can't think what fun anyone gets out of it, the goats complain bitterly the whole way and positively choke them-selves trying to get home!*

*Yesterday we went for a rather more interesting walk, it was our first free Sunday for ages and we walked over the rice-fields, and quite a long way up a jungle path which had been used as a regular thoroughfare by wild elephants and had footprints going in both directions. We thought we might see one but were quite relieved when we didn't! Anne has got a perfect complex about tigers since Fiona read "Man-Eaters of the Kumaon" and told her the juiciest bits!<sup>62</sup>*

*I took them on the golf-course on Saturday, if you remember it is off the main-road but there is a small strip of jungle running along the other edge and we had tea quite close to it – there were some monkeys in the trees and, Anne was convinced, a herd of leopards too and every rustle spelt sudden death – I told her that she needn't worry, leopards always came up from behind and you didn't feel a thing- so she spent the rest of the afternoon in looking quickly over one shoulder!*

*Talking of monkeys, Vicky is very well and getting most independent, she knows meal-times and arrives on the dot for her porridge, orange juice or milk – she likes tea best and sits by the fire gobbling bread and syrup, licking all the syrup off first and each finger in turn when she has finished – we think she has learnt her table manners from Fiona! She teases Candy all the time, pulling her tail and ears and poking her in the nose. Candy is pretty long-suffering but sometimes snaps and Vicky runs off screaming in a very grieved way – but always goes back pretty quick. She is sitting by me at the moment, fast asleep and wheezing slightly, with her head pillowed in her arms, she sleeps all night which is a help, in fact she's no trouble except that she eats the buds on my creepers! The rest of the animals are eating their heads off and doing nothing in return, actually we get a few eggs now, but seem to have a mass of horses!*

*I wonder if you've seen anything of the Cowans, it is terribly bad luck Nicola getting this wretched illness.*

*There doesn't seem any more to say this week darling – so we'll say good-bye, with all our love*

*And lots and lots from me - Mummy*

Notebook: January 7th 1954. So much for my good intentions – the afternoons of a whole week have gone by uncaptured. That last remark, seems especially true, not to say ironic, in view of what has since taken place, and the wish is to be put into practise. this due to a conversation at the club with Mrs P. in which she told me that I was the cause of all the trouble in the district, particularly the "unhappy feeling between polo & tennis. When I expressed surprise, she demanded well what did I expect when I picked bottles of milk off the tennis table & put them on the polo table & brought in cakes with "polo" on them in pink icing – I didn't expect those sort of things to make me exactly popular did I – ask anyone they'll all tell you the same – you just cut yourself off from people etc etc.

January 11th 1954.....And poor me too, because all this has come between me and my lovely cold weather, blurring the colours of my dahlias, forcing itself upon me when I wanted only to wallow in the honey light washing the stumbled rice. I've been irritable and abstracted with the children, and now have a streaming, sodden cold & a golden day has been spent without

profit & serves me right. Actually not quite without profit, for I've read, with watering, stinging eyes, a wonderful book called "Sea & Jungle" (H.M. Tomlinson, 1912), the Amazon has been below me & the endless impenetrable forests hemming me in all day. What descriptive writing, I'm dazzled.

January 27th 1954. My good intentions tailing off already – and January drawing to its close so much of it lost to posterity, I have had a session with G. this morning which has left me with a crashing head-ache & the sensation of having got lost in the pages of a Novelette. She arrived for 11-ses at 12 & stayed till 2, bringing a tale of intrigue & adultery that was, in my opinion, quite ludicrous except that she herself took it so seriously. Apparently she has suspected K for the past few weeks of "carrying on", so decided she'd show him she could beat him at his own game. This necessitated kissing all the young men at the club, which K. took exception to and belaboured her heavily on their arrival home – she showed me a very respectable bruise – but I must admit I would have expected her to have the advantage in an open brawl and can only suppose she stood about & let him take pot shots at her. When she had collected sufficient bruises to be presentable she tottered up to the B.B. & showed them to the W's who were like a father & mother to her ("after all for all his faults, he's a clean living man" she assured me, I couldn't help a small snort). The ludicrous part of the whole thing is that the person whom she suspects of carrying on with K is an intelligent woman, over 40, who could not be the slightest bit interested, mentally or physically, in a chinless youth half her age. Of course I couldn't tell her this and she went off with her little black eyes snapping vindictively, planning to "find him out".

Feb 9th 1954. In bed again after a bilious attack last night feeling as if a steamroller had gone over my stomach and my head was filled with gas & ready to float off any moment. Fiona had the same thing a couple of days ago but we can't pin it down. The last week seems to have been full of G. and from being fairly amusing & "good copy" the whole thing is now rather repulsive and she herself slightly if not completely demented. She keeps storming over with iron curlers sticking from under a blowsy bit of pink chiffon, and pouring out fantastic stories of her wrongs. Her latest accusations about K. are of "carrying on" with a man. I really was shocked about that and I told her so and she demanded if I was on K's side. "Oh no Iris, I'm no fool. I've been married to that man for 3 years & I know a thing or two, believe you me. The trouble is you don't understand. You see I've got proof. I've got it in black & white, I've got a letter". I asked what the letter said. "Well it doesn't say anything exactly, but I'm pretty cute, I can read between the lines. You see he's been lying to me Iris, lies, lies, lies, and now he's even got the servants lying for him. What do you think of that? How can I run a house when my servants are spying on me and telling me lies & my husband is putting them up to it." Here she shakes with sobs at the sad picture she has evoked, and it is sad to think of the "titanic glooms" of her mind. I have never met anyone so obsessed, she can talk & think of nothing else, even in front of the children which is so bad for them. Fortunately they treat her as a huge joke which is not very respectful but preferable to taking her seriously. However there is a good chance they will be moved so I hope it's soon. My head is bursting, so I will leave this and open again on a sane note I hope. What is it about this place?!

February 11th 1954. A day uncomplicated by personalities – beautifully refreshing. Yesterday morning I went over to see Mrs M. and almost at once became involved in her crises and returned flushed and weary. I'm beginning to feel an urgent need to climb a mountain and stand with the clouds against my hot cheeks. When I see the Naga hills caressed in this way I feel sick with longing to be up there in the damp & undemanding silence. I don't know why the stupid insignificant sentences that we exchange over cups of

coffee on hot verandahs should wriggle in & out my thoughts for days afterwards, but I find myself staring blindly into the garden, muttering "That's not the point, the point is she had no right to say it" and missing so much and so much. Why do I have to feel people's voices running along my nerves as if they were telephone wires, and their indecisions and uncertainties become so entangled with my own that I carry a babble of words in my head, and I cannot discover which are my own thoughts among them. But to-day I've seen nobody and the realities have soothed me, the realities of birds and horses and the children's minute by minute dramas.

This morning we went for a walk to the river, through a small settlement of shabby huts under frayed banana palms, deserted except for a pig and a puppy and a baby strung with red & blue beads sitting in the dust with a nose-ring much too big for his small face. The river was only a slimy trickle and very smelly, but we found a fallen tree and amused ourselves eating oranges and reading about tracking in my Guide Book. We then tried to put the knowledge into practice but without much success & agreed that a bit of chalk was really essential though much scorned by True Guides.

Fiona is rather wistful about jolly sociable activities with chums of her own age but Anne merely paws the ground and mouths at her bit & is unimpressed. They both ride every afternoon, Fiona lolling about in a dreamy way with the reins hooked round her little finger, but seemingly in control, anyway very confident. Anne is a dapper & fearless rider but inconsiderate and we have had to close down on her riding the poor old horse to death.

\*

The family moved from Tingalibam to Cherideo Tea Estate in early April 1954 where my father became the Manager, and where they stayed for the rest of their years in Assam. My mother wrote me a letter describing the move.



Iris to Alan, Cherideo 13th April 1954

*Darling Alan,*

*Sorry for the gap, but you will have gathered I've been very busy moving and to-day seems to be the first time I've sat down for a week, my legs are so tired I can hardly carry my shoes around! However its been fun, and we are all intact, including the animals which are in heaven here, with paddocks to graze in all over the place, we have a couple of acres of lovely grass at the bottom of the garden where the cows spend most of the time and it looks like an English country scene to see them grazing from our verandah. The goats joined them this afternoon, but spent their time pounding up and down the fence to get at the shrubs which are the pride of this garden. Silly things, typical of them.*

*Vicky has been the menace all along, a perfect pest while we were packing and even more when we got here as she felt so strange she clung even more ferociously to my neck and screamed madly if we tried to shut her up anywhere. She is settling slowly, but this bungalow has lovely shrubs and creepers all round it which she is tearing to shreds so we have decided we shall have to keep her caged most of the time, sad but she is incredibly destructive for anything so small!*

*Daddy moved on Friday in awful weather, and we and all our possessions followed on Saturday morning in sunshine. The girls went off on the first lorry with their livestock, all bleating and scuffling and quacking, and I was a little anxious about whether one or two of them (Fiona particularly) would be dropped off en route but I found them all safe and sound when I arrived. On Sunday morning we did some unpacking and then went for a drive round the garden, it is so attractive, all up and down with a couple of enormous water tanks where we plan to do some fishing, the girls took a picnic down to the bigger tank yesterday and counted 52 people fishing it so I fear there isn't a lot of chance for us amateurs!*

*Cherideo has large hills all round, one of which used to be used by the old kings of Assam as a "holy" hill and a temple was built on it to which they made a pilgrimage every year with all their elephants and gods and what-nots – we climbed it on Tuesday and found only a few pillars in a tangle of the jungle but a wonderful view of the Assam valley all round. Can't think how they ever got elephants up, it was all we could do to drag ourselves up and coming down was worse – we wish we could find some buried treasure, we are sure there must be plenty, perhaps we'll dig one day. There are several huge mounds where they used to bury their dead which I'm sure must be full of gold – or pottery at least.*

*I will describe the house and garden in my next letter – I must get this off or you will be writing me letters beginning "Still no letters"!*

*My love to everyone – and lots and lots to you darling –*

*Mummy xxx*

Notebook: April 17th 1954. So there went the cold weather – and too much has happened to attempt to go back on it. Now we have left Tingalibam and are starting to stamp memories all over Cherideo. It is enchanting here.

I couldn't go on as Fiona caused panic & consternation by disappearing into the jungle with a bundle over one shoulder, and we set out to look for her, 2 syces, 2 malis & I – the syces and malis encouraging me greatly by describing the maps of leopards & tigers that were known to haunt the vicinity. We found little bits of blue wool tied to the bushes which heartened me, but then they stopped & I started running & shouting & gasping hysterically, imagining Fiona lost in the jungle as night fell, her terror & danger, and our discovering next day of the little pile of blood-stained garments – by this time my shouts were interspersed

with prayers of the black-mailing "oh god if you let me off this time" variety & when Fiona eventually appeared, cheerful & unconcerned, I didn't know whether to hit her or be sick. I think the danger was exaggerated, probably didn't exist, but it is a wearying country for ones nerves. Fiona was very grieved at our refusal to allow her to go for walks on her own again & I came across a touching entry in her diary "A walk I will always remember" – it took me back to woods of my childhood & the ecstasy of alone-ness.

There are no further letters until Iris was on her way back to England with Fiona and Anne, and wrote to Donald from Calcutta..

(Friday) from the Grand Hotel, Calcutta, 11th June 1954

*My darling one,*

*At last I have a moment when I'm not too exhausted and the kids are quiet (actually asleep, both of them together) to let you know how we're getting on.*

*To start from the beginning, we had a good trip to Jorhat, arriving at 11.15. I.S.T.<sup>63</sup> with quite a gap to fill. The Air Force has taken over the main buildings at the Air Port and all that's left to us is a small tent, no refreshments and no convenience to our dismay, however we took our lunch to the shade of a bamboo clump and ate our bits of chicken and were "excused" and sat about watching the planes come in – all in public but there was no other cool place. Our plane left at 2 and we had an excellent trip, hardly a bump although it was very cloudy and raining some of the time, the kids enjoyed it and Anne wasn't a bit squeamish, she slept some of the time and Fiona read lurid American magazines and bellowed things like "Mummy what does rape mean?" at me which I had to explain in a roar to penetrate the cotton wool! We got to Calcutta at 5.30 and were duly met and taken to the hotel, it is very sticky here and the Air Conditioning is heaven, apart from being clean and cool the rooms are newly furnished with green marble bathrooms, Dunlippes etc., and so quiet – I can't tell you how thankful we are for it darling – the only snag of course being that it is like plunging into a Turkish bath every time we go out. I am quite won over to Air Conditioning, its wonderful to have a bath and dress without sweating. I wish it wasn't costing you so much though. The food is quite good, we had lunch in "Princes" to-day, also A.C'd and most tastefully decorated – the Chinese Restaurant is extra so we have refrained. The hotel is full of the oddest people as usual and the girls spend their time saying "Mummy don't stare" Fiona's idea of Calcutta is that everyone looks like Mrs Couper – poor Geraldine.*

*Yesterday morning I rang up Lahoti but his car had gone to the hospital with his wife, he was most apologetic and said if he'd known he'd have made "other arrangements" for her. Sounded a bit callous! So we did some shopping on foot, very wearing and in the afternoon Alice's<sup>64</sup> friend Mrs Morrice took us to the swimming pool which the kids adored, they chummed up with a couple of fat girls and giggled and pushed each other in all afternoon. Mrs M. has been very kind, she took them again this morning while I did all the chores and fitted in a hair appointment with Lahoti's car and a very nice driver who refused a tip at the end – All went smoothly although I had to wait about a lot. I have only my Travellers Cheques to get now and a few more presents. I found I was only allowed 22 lbs luggage for the kids coming down so was over weight, but have bought a suitcase and should be alright now. We went to the New Market this evening and had rather a time changing the gold mohurs.<sup>65</sup> A sinister gentleman made us follow him miles to "my brother" until I began to wonder if he was a White Slave Trader and Fiona didn't help by hissing "Mummy he's trying to kidnap us" (shades of the "Blue Chatoo"),<sup>66</sup> so by the time we got to his equally sinister "brother" ... [further page(s) missing]*



Iris arrived in England on 12th June 1954 to find her parents searching for a new house as the relative who had rented 'By the Way' to them wanted to sell it and they could not have afforded to buy it. The story of how she found us all a house in the Lake District is told in *Lakeland Life*. Fiona and Anne were settled into Fairfield School at Ambleside and it marks the end of the Dragon School period for me and going to Sedbergh in September 1955.

Cherideo- Purbut Tea Estate.

Indian Staff Club Association ..... 1954. November.

Present-

Gentlemen and the Lovely brothers,

On behalf of the Indian Staff I express my sincere gratitude for your kind presence here, in such a cold-evening. By the way, taking an opportunity, I am happy to say in short, that the Staff now, through the generous and sympathetic considerations from the present Manager, namely Mr.D.K.Macfarlane and his assistants is obtained this well equipped Club building; which I again express in pleasure will surely keep firm and sincere Co-operations and relations between the Managements and the Staff .

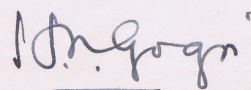
I with pleasure further relate and hope that this act of the present Management of this estate, will keep the fit Monument of the Company's past Centenary Celebrations.

Lastly my vary vocation to you. that to confirm my expressions I pray you all to call the Heaven's name once, as to keep us in happy and hearty to amuse such Societies.

Oh: Heaven, Oh: God, Ala-Hi-Akbar, Hori-Bole.

Drama Screening with prayers.

Cherideo.  
13/11/1954.

  
For and on behalf of the Indian-  
Staff Club Association.





Seven planters on December 25th 1954 at Nazira Club (re-union of group from March 1939)  
Donald second from right.

## 1955

My father's left Calcutta for home leave on 20th April 1955 by air leaving Robert Higham<sup>67</sup> as acting manager at Cherideo. We were together as a family in England until my parents left for India on the 'Strathaird' 1st November 1955 and arrived back at Cherideo on 20th November, Iris for the first time without any of her children..

Notebook: November 1955. Doves and a lawn mower & mynahs walking in family groups on the lawn. She smell of mimosa, feather umbrella shaped trees, long shadows on the gold grass, a capering calf blundering into wire netting & then sitting down in a cow pat, presents of chocolates, & biscuits & Indian gin and eel-like fish in a large saucepan. Black & gold butterfly (birdwing) on the poinsettias, hooded white figures squatting on the lawn picking up leaves, acres of polished red cement, meaty butter & fishy milk, brown bath water.

Nov. 24th. Wrote Alan, painted the bungalow, tried flower pictures, but got very cross.

Nov. 25th. Jean [Higham] came in morning, tried out [sewing] machine but it made black spiders webs at the back. The battle of the saucers is on – rusty tins of Golden Syrup, Nescafe, jugs – All on odd saucers. Tried to do some organising before breakfast felt Dead Keen and cut some Poinsettias stuck them on the kitchen fire, cover covered with soot & sticky milky stuff from the stems. Fed the bazaar hens, pounded round looking efficient but no servants turned up so all rather a flop. Finally tried organising breakfast which resulted in waiting half an hour longer and 1 cup tepid coffee. Copied out recipes after lunch, but my enthusiasm is waning already as everything in the way of ingredients is lacking. Gave the cook a vivid demonstration of what to do with the stew, bent double putting imaginary casserole dish into bottom oven but he merely remarked that the "[unclear]" would break if put on top of fire! Feel frustrated at every turn. Cut out Christmas cards & watered round compound after tea & Roger [Werner] came in evening. Masters<sup>68</sup> is coming to stay with him.

Nov. 26th. Went round hospital, usual Belsen babies with coffee-sticks for arms and jagged ribs & huge hooded eyes in shrunken faces. And dirty childlike mothers with beautiful firm breasts & a man with T.B. under a green blanket with nothing to do but stare at white walls. Then on to seed garden where we saw 2 birdwings & 2 huge swallowtails with double tails lounging & swooping in the dappled peace of bamboos – the contrasts of this country!

Afterwards tried to show the cook how to cook a cabbage but the stove wouldn't work & got very hot & frustrated. Spent the afternoon making Xmas cards, then had 2 miserable sessions, one with the Tingalibam bearer who used to be so smart, is now yellow-eyed, black toothed & pathetic, anxious for a job. Any job - but there are none - then in the Cow-house where one of the calves is dying, stretched on its side under an old sack its long neck and big ears making it look young and sad, seem to have seen so many ribs & bloated stomachs & big tired young eyes to-day.

In the evening went to "Tea Party" at Union Headquarters, lot of paper flowers & garlands of marigolds, & a speech by the K.B. but as he has no teeth & everyone went on talking, missed this – a tea out of our cups followed by whisky out of our glasses & cold flabby potato chips which we ate behind a screen covered with bright pink houses. Another speech & it was over, but woke up in the night feeling very sick with tummy, sat on the edge of the bath feeling very depressed but some bicarb fixed me.

Nov. 27th. Spent morning finishing cards. Read diary & dozed after lunch, went to look at factory & on to Dhole Bhagan<sup>69</sup>. A lovely fleecy night sky & a fire! The calf died. Still feeling low & liverish.

Dec. 1st. Tim Healy came in the morning so had to spend my morning sitting around with my nose powdered, but he didn't arrive till 12.30. Spent the afternoon writing my thriller<sup>70</sup>. I draw a deck chair out into the sun and write till 4 but am distracted by the dramas of ants and grains of sugar in the brick work, and by the birds that come to drink a couple of feet from me – today a spotted dove, gripping the edge nervously with its pink feet & taking a long time to decide whether it really could reach – and the usual flurry of sparrows. At 4.30, as we sit down to tea, the tennis court becomes an airfield, as egrets come in to land, undercarriages retracted, wings glittering in the sun. They let down their legs and turn from skimming streamlined beauty into gangly old men in white flannel picking their way across the pebbles at the beach. They lift their legs very high and their heads go backwards and forwards as they mince across the lawn, occasionally breaking into a run that makes them look like old women running for bus. Then quite suddenly ....[next page missing]

Dec. 6th. Dinah<sup>71</sup> has arrived – soft, sleek & wild in a floppy way – all rubber where Juno was wire. I started her training to-day she fetches a sock & sits for a biscuit but is still haywire. Also took her for a walk on a rope but it was like landing an eel – a black thrashing object tripping me up at every step.

On Sunday went to the club in the afternoon to watch the cricket, but talked schools & children to Lavender [Corps] & Peggy [Davies] instead – it was hot but I enjoyed my morning & eating my lunch in a deck chair with a Ngaoi Marsh<sup>72</sup> in one hand.

On Saturday went to a Manipuri dance in the lines – we arrived as invited at 8, but the dancing party didn't turn up till 9 – we were offered boiled sweets & rum & I was cold & tired and thought the puppy would be eating my needles – at last after much altering of lights & skirts) an orchestra (one drum, one cymbals & skeleton party)1 good dancer, one bad etc got going . It was pretty, the girls rippling in the half light, the drummer getting more & more ...[Rest of this section is missing]

## 1956

No letters from Assam have survived for much of this year but luckily Iris continued to write in her notebook from time to time.

Notebook: Easter Sunday 1st Apr 1956

Fiona's birthday - 12. A hot, sultry day. Mac away playing golf, leaves lying like discarded brown paper on the lawn, Easter hymns on the wireless, a lump of meat brought as a present from the Babus, eye-flies, an orchid tied with wire to a post of the verandah, Dinah pinned to the verandah for her Rabies injections. Easter Day. I remember this day last year, the fields full of spring lambs, the children and I going for a picnic, climbing stone walls, squabbling, becoming footsore in my woolie boots, but happy and invigorated. I remember daffodils glinting with Easter eggs, daffodils round the Altar - but Christ is Risen here as there, the message of Easter is the same, a message of reconciliation - "turn but a stone and stir a wing" - here or there. "This is Resurrection time" says the voice of prophesy; but for some people it is not. There is a butterfly on my orchid and a bowl of roses beside me, I am lucky, I wonder how God can bear to look at all the suffering on the earth, we are his children but I could not allow my children to suffer so and my love is meagre compared to His - even if it was their fault I could not allow it. But I am judging Him by human standards. Fiona will just be waking now, counting her money, wishing she could feel the authentic birthday thrill. She will look out of the window at that wonderful view and be sad and holy and happy - but I'm so sorry for her, having to face the years between 12 and 16 - perhaps it won't be as bad for her as it was for me. I can almost understand Jesus' pleasure in taking upon himself the sins and pains of the world. I would be so happy to suffer for my children...

The yellow silk cotton is still flowering, yellow glitter-wax flowers on caterpillar branches. And the purple bougainvillea. Hibiscus flowers are breaking out like a rash on the bushes, a Persian Lilac sprays pale mauve flowers on the grass, the cuckoo-shrike sings at night and in the early morning, I sweat when I take the dogs out for their walk (sleepers and human excreta - 3 wide apart sleepers then 2 close together, Dinah licking her lips, convolvulus like white snakes roaming the jungle). The pigeons coo and coo, they love the heat, the squaw has soft, silky, grey feathers and pale pink legs, it sits in Mac's hand with the surprised effrontery of an elderly gent disturbed by the plumber in his bath. We went on to Communion on Wednesday, the road was a sea of puddles and Mac's language most irreverent, there were only 6 of us altogether, our knees cracked when we knelt, my tummy rumbled, I knew it was Nazira bread I was eating, I could not make it anything else. The padre seemed nice, but apparently sees himself not as other men - not as planters anyway - prayed for the Queen, Queen Mother, Prime Minister - and the planters with their load of sin! Vegetable curry for lunch, a rest, a headache at tea-time, a walk and bed - so Easter day will go this year.

Monday 2nd Apr 1956

Assamese phrases - "a burning sensation caused by the want of fresh air", "the protuberance of the snout of a crocodile or Adam's apple", "rendered shaking by touch of a musk rat" "sereleeberelee - scattered", "Prosperity, the planet Mars, Tuesday".

It is still no hotter, as we have had storms and rain. My hen has been sulking, screaming "Help, Help" and finally flung all her eggs out in disgust. The pani-wallah, who is drunk, tells me he will shut her up with his "First-class" cock and that will sort her!

Dr Laing has lent me a book on Buddhism which is interesting but I am neither intellectually adequate or mystically receptive enough to understand it. I start as a Wheel of Becoming, turn into a karma - created bundle of characteristics, and when I have opened the thousand petals of my soul (I'm now a lotus) I become a dewdrop in the Shining Sea. I cannot understand the philosophy of disassociation, subduing of desires, conjoined with the 2 basic principals of love and compassion. How can one love and disassociate oneself? But it removes the fear of death and gives instead the Plenum-Void, which is safer but dull. Of course I haven't understood. Dr L told us the story of the spinster who mended his

trousers, very ostentatiously, sitting on deck and saying "Doctor's trousers" suggestively to all who passed.

Found a pale pink frog climbing up the wall when I went to have a bath, changing to the pale green paint, its eyes popping out of its head like a man on a razor's edge precipice. I picked it off and it wetted hysterically.

Got the girls school reports "Anne is confused and not so lively" perhaps she is unhappy. I wish I was a true Buddhist and could overcome all worldly desires - such as the longing to jump on the next plane home.

Manufacturing has started and the D.B.<sup>73</sup> is ill, he started to vomit blood in the night and was at death's door but asking in a faint voice to be informed at once if there was an urgent case in the hospital! Dr Curran was sent for and arrived in his dressing gown reeking of whisky. To-morrow I am going to present prizes at the school sports which should be amusing. My Assamese is still at the "fat cat" stage and I can't see myself getting any further without help

Bina Hit Parade

(7) Its always to-morrow (Jo Stafford)

(6) Memories are Made of this

(5) Shoot it Again (Theresa Brewer)

(4) Only You

(3) He (?)

(2) I owe my soul to the Company Store - 16 tons

(1) Memories of You (Rosemary Cluny)

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 20th April 1956

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for the long letter from Field Head, I've rather lost track of movements now but I hope this will catch up with you - sorry about the typewriter, it has just about given up but Daddy is too busy to be bothered with requests for another ribbon just now.*

*We were amused to hear about the trout eggs,<sup>74</sup> I wonder if they survived long enough to go into Black Beck. Roger Werner has very kindly given you his copy of "The Crabtrees go Fishing" which is the book I was trying to get at home, so I'll send it off with a rather amusing book I pinched from the library called "Calling All Fly Fishers". Have your Fishing Gazettes come yet? They make me wild with envy to get all the wonderful things they advertise but on the whole I think its more fun to improvise your own stuff.*

*Daddy went fishing yesterday afternoon with Roger Werner but didn't catch anything, in fact to be honest I don't think he fished much, he was feeling hot and tired after two rounds of golf in the morning, and went round a corner where Roger couldn't see him and lay in the water. Anyway it isn't a very good stretch of river there. I didn't fish, it was all I could do to cross the river on a long thin bamboo bridge without any sides, it was extremely wobbly and the bits of bamboo made me feel terribly dizzy, we came back in the dark which was a bit better as I couldn't see the enormous drop into about a foot of water.*

*On Saturday we went into the club to see the "Blue Gardenia" which was a thriller, I enjoyed it only it wasn't all that thrilling as the murderer was quite obvious, being no part of the story at all so obviously must be the murderer otherwise she wouldn't have come into it at all.*

*I have finished typing my thriller and Daddy is reading it at the moment, he says he thinks it "jolly good" but seems quite able and willing to put it down which he doesn't usually with a thriller - so I'm a bit depressed about it. The only good thing is that he hasn't guessed Who Dun It which I thought I had made too obvious. I shall send it off to an agent this week but I'm afraid it will come back pretty quick, but nobody can say I haven't tried.<sup>75</sup>*

*This week has been terribly dull, I don't know what I shall find to write to you about now that the hot weather has started because nothing ever happens. The man-eater hasn't materialised and the head-hunters haven't attacked, all most disappointing really. The police are very active and dashing about checking up on guns etc. and the Gurkhas have been called in, the only people who seem to be quite out of the picture are the Nagas themselves!*

*I can't possibly fill up another page of typing - I shall start keeping a proper diary<sup>76</sup> now I've finished my book and copy it out for your letters. The dogs are well, Candy is definitely going to have puppies I'm glad to say, but not too many I hope. Dinah is enormous almost as big as Juno<sup>77</sup> though not as fat, Juno looks huge in spite of her 3 miles a day. The pigeons fly round the drawing-room and perch on the backs of chairs in spite of dogs and cats.*

*Enclose a rather amusing poem from "fishing gazette" -  
Much love from us all - Mummy*

Notebook: 25th Apr 1956 The school<sup>78</sup> prize giving turned out to be appalling - we went at 2 and for two hours sat and listened to a lot of fat girls moaning into a microphone. There was an overpowering smell of bad breath and unwashed bodies and marigolds and I was presented with a dish of little seeds to eat which turned out to be aniseed. At 4 I gave out the prizes, a collection of grubby paper-covered books, and then Public Speeches started - I left at 6 and Mac returned at 10.30 and speeches had been going on all that time. After 20 minutes of "gobolois" and "hobows" I asked Mac what the man said - "He was just telling us to mill in" - a masterly paraphrase? The speeches consisted of sacked teachers and plunked students getting up and shouting the odds at each other - accusing each other and the headmaster of corruption and all in front of the children. I only understood words here and there - "Municipal Tax - bilak" "Meneger Cherideo", "Government High-ee school". One speech lasted 3 hours 20 minutes Mac said with only a few minutes pause every hour. Finally a lot of resolutions were passed all starting "Meneger, Cherideo T.E. will provide ..." These people have absorbed the structure of social planning - the committees, final reports, minimum resolutions to be passed, meetings to be presided over - but not the spirit behind it.

The police have now thrown a "steel ring" round the Naga Hills<sup>79</sup> according to the papers - a couple of trembling links sat on our verandah the other day, "Nagas are about to attack, you will please to take necessary precautions", "What do you suggest?" "You will inform police"! Mac suggested that a guard be put on Cherideo, so 2 chowkidars were chosen - the mad one whom I haunt, and the other, only slightly less mad, who keeps bringing pots of tea when I want hot bottles and vice-versa. So Cherideo safety is in capable hands!

All the hot-weather sights and sounds are here - "Make more pekoe" all night, "You're ill" all day, a bird like the twang of a guitar string on two notes, blobs of white simul floating like parachutes and lying on the grass, an eternal hum of grasshoppers, black butterflies, white butterflies, pigeons and mason wasp building its egg-depository in my letter-rack. And on walks the thatch, flowering, like a jade green sea topped with white breakers. The dappled darker-green sea of tea-bushes, with lace shade trees over it. Indian corn as a vegetable, hot-water in the cold tap, fans and a deadly lethargy.

18th May 1956 Nearly a month - the amusing Naga menace became a nasty reality on 8th when we were woken in the night by shots - seemed horribly close, Mac made us move to the spare room and we sat up until it got light, I was quite petrified which was a pity, thought I might Rise to the Occasion but my nerves got hold of me and shook me from head to foot. Wasn't so much frightened of the shots as the thought of a screaming horde of naked savages suddenly bursting through the cannas waving dhows. The poor little chowkidar who we laughed at walked round and round the bungalow all night with a little stick over his shoulder



- very brave and useless. The labour were wonderful in fact, none of them batted an eyelid - which made me feel even more ashamed of my fear which lasted for several days and nights and turned the friendly hills into a menace and made me dread the dark and wore me out. It was very hot and I had a bilious attack on Monday - which I can perhaps make into an excuse? The police, comfortably installed in the C.B. stable and dug in behind sandbags, were not much of a protection as nothing would have shifted them. Now we have some sullen Gurkhas, but no more attacks thank goodness - and I have got over my nerves though it would only need a couple of shots to start me off again.

The padre came last Saturday, a nice, intelligent little man, with a priceless shrill giggle. I was watching dung-beetles on the lawn when he arrived "Go to the ant thou sluggard" should be "Go to the dung-beetle thou doubter" they were handling huge balls of dung over enormous hazards, bracing their backs against blades of grass and refusing to give up. The balls rolled down into holes and got wedged behind clods of earth and the beetles came out to reconnoitre and judge and work out all possible modes of freeing them. I took a Parable from Nature - Assamese Angorogungar - "the uneasy sensation caused by movement of the bowels".

24th May 1956 Buddha Jayanti day and a blood-red moon - a rather awe-inspiring sight, according to the bearer it happens every year and as a Hindu he is not allowed to eat or drink while it is in progress. Must find out what the phenomenon is, I almost felt it was an omen - horrid memories of Dan Dare and the Red Moon kept coming back - almost expected to see it swell and swell and Gautama himself to step out. "Seek in the impersonal for the eternal man, and having sought him out look inward - thou art Buddha". "The faint of heart will ever seek some resting place, some weak finality; for the strong, the first and the last word is and ever more will be: Walk On". "Now is the moment of Salvation". "Life is a bridge - build no house upon it: a river - cling not to its banks." "Cause and effect are one, two sides of the same coin". "The cause of misery is desire - the cause of desire is ignorance, the belief that the part can pit its separate self against the whole". "Work out your own salvation with diligence". "Right Action, Right Speech, Right Samadhi (Thought), Right Livelihood, Right Exertion, Right Remembrance, Right Meditation". "No optimism is worth its salt that does not go all the way with pessimism and arrive at a point beyond it". "The body, form or shape: the feelings and sensations: perception or recognition, sensuous or material: tendencies, mental and physical discrimination" "Impermanent are all Component things" "All that we are is the result of that we have thought" "Every man is the moulder and the sole creator of his life to come" "Settles for evermore the ponderous equation to its line, and man and mole, star and sun, must range to it" "The day of Judgement is at all times and for everyone - today" "Egoism is the beginning and end of sin" "Hatred ceaseth not by hatred: hatred ceaseth but by love. This is the eternal law" "Suffering and evil form the souls gymnasium in which to strengthen virtue" "All means towards right action avail not the sixteenth part of emancipation of the heart through love" "To have realised the Truths and traversed the Path: to have broken the Bonds, put an end to the Intoxications, got rid of the Hindrances, mastered the craving for metaphysical speculation, was to have attained the ideal. "The unimpeded interdiffusion of all particulars" "The Void of the Unmanifest" Zen Buddhism wearies of learning and strives to know. Discards the apparatus of religion, cultivates the faculty of direct awareness "When a finger points at the moon it is foolish to confuse the finger with the moon". "Two hands when clapped make a sound. What is the sound of one hand clapping? Zen is the joke in a joke and cannot, like a joke, be 'explained'". "If you walk, just walk: if you sit, just sit, but don't wobble" "A foretaste of the Absolute Moment of Cosmic Consciousness of the condition in which I and my Father are one".

I have a Bodhi-tree in my garden. Two days ago we had a mad evening with Father Paul and a tiddly Supt. of Excise - he took us through the whole Hindu mythology and with each incarnation said to Fr. Paul "Just like Jesus, born in the vater of a vomans vombs". We sat round like a lot of rabbits hypnotised by a snake - finally gave him dinner which he ate off the end of his knife - and got rid of him at 11.30. The New India - but whose example? Fr. Paul told us the story of the Naga panic at Naharkhuti<sup>80</sup> when 20,000 people left their homes as a result of the Dilly Coal Mine manager getting into an altercation with one Naga. Fr. P. is absolutely scathing about the Assamese, will not hear a word of good about them, one wonders consequently mauve and patchy - and very naughty. He spends a lot of time digging large holes in the bed round the bungalow and uprooting my begonias and fills in the rest of his time pulling lumps out of the bear rug, chasing the cats, chewing my book or magazine that happens to be around and leaving an unbroken line of puddles through the house. Dinah enters into all these activities with enormous enthusiasm, in fact the idea of chasing which has never occurred to her before strikes her in all its delicious freshness - and she chases pigeons and cows as well as cats and I scree how he can spend his life amongst them treating them as immortal souls.

### 3rd Jun 1956 Anne's birthday - 10

Mac away playing golf, a humid, overcast morning, my calf with foot- and-mouth disease, one egg, a clean rug for the pups, a lot of walking about doing flowers and putting clean towels, a feeling of depression and inadequacy. The first time I have missed Anne's birthday - but she will be happy with her friends and not sense my dreary nostalgia. Have a feeling of suspension, irresolution, drifting indecision - the certainty of opposite interests, lack of contact, wastes of separating desert. A purposelessness colours my whole day, my interests are forced, I have no burning desire to do anything. Partly climate, partly lack of vitamins, mostly the feeling that my enthusiasms are considered foolish and only to be "pandered to" and of no real value except to keep me amused. To lose one's dignity in a country like this is to enter the waste land - but I am probably only tired after a club night. Feel very Housemanish<sup>81</sup> "I hear my bones within me say Another night Another day". I must start my new book.

The hoegastrima is flowering, the Summer house roof caught fire yesterday. I have caught no butterflies. What have I done? Read and read, remembered a little, felt doors opening - but if I go through them I will be stepping still further away. My darling Annie, my "everlasting daughter"!

1st Jul 1956 Mac away playing golf, a breeze rustling the flecked trees, parrots bickering; another cow with foot and mouth; an urge to paint; puppies rolling like shiny leaves across the grass. Last night when we got back from the club were stopped by a crowd of frightened villagers, to say that the Nagas were on the hills with torches and we had better wait for police re-inforcements - however nothing came of it. This last month has been horrid - first Candy bitten by a mad dog and resulting panic and hard work to wean the pups (i.e. Story idea, tension and uncertainty till verdict on brain arrives), then cows with foot and mouth, then my book<sup>82</sup> rejected and Mummy's letter demanding money on the same day. But as a background my reading has taken me into the Assam of magic and torture and gold ruled over by the Ahom kings. My schoolmaster has left to take M.A., my Assamese has reached "Standard V" and the glimmerings of understanding and perception are showing through. It is very hot and very beautiful, the hills cobalt blue, the greens of tea and jungle every shade, jade, peacock, olive and emerald. Lavender and I went to Sibsagar on Tuesday and saw a burnt red temple by a rippling lake framed in blue hills - the country side was flooded so that the blues and greens melted and ran into each other, there was a freshness, a liquid translucence that India seldom offers. As usual there were also some "trousered cads" to

cough down our necks! The Shivdhole<sup>83</sup> was beautifully engraved with flower patterns, animals, heavenly kings on horses and even a mermaid - inside it was dark and sinister and snake-infested we felt - so we didn't explore. I am hurt and discouraged about my book.

24th Jul 1956 The whole world is awash after several days of rain, the rice fields are like an inland sea, the little streams are brown lumpy monsters, hurrying and snorting over flattened bamboos, the river at the bottom of the garden is bloated all over the fields on either side and my bridge is under water. It cleared up this evening and as usual was breathtaking, the blue hills emerging as fresh and beautiful as brides from the veil of clouds, the sky reflected in the fields and everything sleek and trembling. Nice to think of all the filth that has been washed away but sad to think of the inevitable homeless, the Brahmaputra must be a roaring flood.

All the puppies have gone except Toad<sup>84</sup>, they each took a bit of my heart and I won't ever be able to do this again. Toad is suffering from a skin disease that I am painting with Gentian Violet and is consequently mauve and patchy - and very naughty. He spends a lot of time digging large holes in the bed round the bungalow and uprooting my begonias and fills in the rest of his time pulling lumps out of the bear rug, chasing the cats, chewing my book or magazine that happens to be around and leaving an unbroken line of puddles through the house. Dinah enters into all these activities with enormous enthusiasm, in fact the idea of chasing which has never occurred to her before strikes her in all its delicious freshness - and she chases pigeons and cows as well as cats and I screech how he can spend his life amongst them treating them as immortal souls.

am myself hoarse - yesterday she chased the military's ducks backwards and forwards across a large puddle while they shrieked with laughter and I with rage. am myself hoarse - yesterday she chased the military's ducks backwards and forwards across a large puddle while they shrieked with laughter and I with rage.

I have hatched two jungli moorghi chicks - they were like bulls-eyes or bumble-bees to begin with, scuttling about from the moment they came out of the eggs. Now they are brown all over and a dark line running down their heads and backs and mottled wings.

The Nagas have been active and the Chief Minister has been touring the disturbed areas in an armour-plated car with 2 slits for his eyes "to restore confidence" he says. He awarded a medal and Rs 50 to a coolie at Seleng who cut up a Naga - how foolish can one get! The Nagas raided a station at Suntok, removed the station-master's dhoti and left him furiously trying to ring up the police, without telling him they had cut the telephone wires 2 hours before. They went to Lakmijan and to Slimy's shop at Gelakey where they removed his wireless and all the gold and jewels they could lay their hands on. The police are conspicuous for their absence on all these occasions.

20th Aug 1956 We are beginning to say the hot weather is nearly over - This is the worst month I think - the creases in ones elbows are permanently sticky, one hair is stiff as dry grass, pores open and morale low. Next month we shall see the wag-tail and the evenings will get cooler and we'll plant our seeds and I shall start making Christmas cards. The Nagas have been quiet, in spite of a scare on Independence day and much running about in lorries by the military - but the Suez Canal crisis<sup>85</sup> colours our thoughts and last thing at night I find myself panicking slightly - what shall we do if there's a war, where go, what country would be best for us, and how get us together? It seems incredible that the word "hostility" should ever be mentioned and sad to see the bitterness and hatred felt towards the British uncovered. How helpless we are, in the hands of our diplomats, whatever we may feel they can plunge us into war if they are "firm" and "steadfast" and "at all costs" defend the traditions for which we stand. Such glib phrases, so crisply spoken. and in exact terms they mean ruin, starvation, possibly the end of the world. Sometimes I feel that it is not the world for children to grow up

in - and yet, who knows that they might not be better to die young - or that the fear of sudden extinction is worse than the terrible fears of jealousy, financial ruin or cancer with which our lives are burdened? I wonder what Buddha's answer to the problems of to-day would be - striving with diligence for one's own salvation seems curiously inadequate and unrealistic, perhaps Zen Buddhism's assertion that nothing exists except in the imagination is the most comforting.

Against the background of news broadcasts and depression, parrots feed and squeak in the trees and fly on whirring arcs across the evening sky, hoegastrimu, hibiscus, leconia, Ixora and gloriosa superba flower in the garden and the mimosa has puffed into flower, the first winter smell. Women with glittering wrists move in a strange ritual through the patterned tea, bullocks plod through grey mud and women with bundles of rice-seedlings bend and straighten, bend and straighten like birds dancing. The fields are patchwork, grey, lemon, veridian, and emerald as the different stages of the rice-planting continues. I tried to paint them but without success.

In the club the leaden-ness of over-proximity prevails. We stand at the bar and drink and sweat it out and see our noses shining out of the corners of our eyes and say "How are the children?" and pretend we are enjoying ourselves. It sounds drearier than it is because there are the good moment - the tea-cups rattling in Mac's hands and the knowledge that there is a whole day to do what I like in. The joy of our Air Conditioner after lunch, with a detective story, and at night. The endless cheerfulness of the dogs who believe that life is one long lark. The pleasure of writing and reading, reading and writing, that have been denied me for so long.

24th Oct 1956 So the hot weather is over - the worst that I can remember - so many worries and crises on top of the heat that it is in retrospect like a bad dream. Now our finances are more stable, Nasser has piped down, ditto Nagas - and the sun sets at 6 p.m. It almost too good to be true.

The cold weather sights and sounds - Chinese hat beginning to flower, and Japanese hibiscus; cold weather grass like silver spears along the railways line; fantastic dust sunsets: the rice a rich jade green and beginning to ripen; egrets on the lawn at tea time and parrots flying from the hills to the plains at night: pappas for breakfast, and oranges (4 on our own tree!) and seed boxes. I see them in my sleep.

I seem to have achieved so little this rains - learnt a little Assamese - written a few chapters of my book (which won't be published). Written my first accepted article<sup>86</sup> (which hasn't yet been published), painted 2 portraits - what a lot of time wasted. It is the climate that is against me. That and the feeling that there might be a war and what was the use of writing detective stories or learning a language when life might explode under your feet any moment - a feeble excuse but true nevertheless.

Mac has been depressed and frustrated too - overwork and finances chiefly and irritation with the men at H.Q. who write letters "Kindly walk round your requisitioned land they say" - come and walk round yourself I answered, and have a look at a tea-bush while you're at it. The I.T.A [Indian Tea Association]!!" Etc etc.

My only poem.

There is a cloth-white house, briar-rose embroidered.  
A lawn smocked in a daisy design.  
Glitter and slide of streams, of apples falling  
Cuckoo and curlews and children's voices calling  
And the children mine.

Here there are peacock hills, rivers of sesame  
Evenings of musk and mango-gold  
Bright bamboo tresses, sleek and silver dew.  
Hornbills to tear the calico sky in two  
~~And love~~ Secrets not told [Last line wrong]

My Assamese has progressed to the stage of being able to read discourses. Nabuchandra Bardeloi educated in Gauhati High-ee school and passing all his exams and going to Calcuttaloi and passing all his exams and becoming an Eenspector etc. But I am on the verge of being able to read the simple legends of the Ahom kings, another few months will see me reading fairly fluently I hope. I must get a teacher.

My jungli-moorghi died during the hot spell - sad and my fault I feel. The first of the egrets has just come into land and I must go out and look at my seeds, take the dogs for a walk and back to a hot bath - had a nice letter about Alan so perhaps life isn't so bad.

7th Nov 1956 Father Paul: Blessing the graveyards - because the body must be reverenced as the shrine of the Holy Ghost - And will be re-united with the soul after the Last Judgement. Describing the distribution of milk powder "I was fighting actually: fisting them off. Worse than cows they were Horrible!"

I am sitting on the verandah after lunch, doing what I dreamed of through the hot weather - watching the egrets stalk on stilts across the lawn, smelling mimosa, listening to doves, cool and sleepy. A tiger has just killed on the drive and Mac is going to sit up for it, I hope he doesn't shoot it.

We have just come back from our trip to the North Bank - a lovely interlude - my memories: - a dark Hindu temple on a hill by the Bramaputra, tree guarded, monkeys, two small lighted images in a vault-like silence. Beautiful tangled forests, thatched houses on stilts, gay, slant-eyed men with tin ornaments in their ears, and the river, frothing into rapids against a background of silver pampas grass, black green forest around cobalt blue hills. I caught 3 fish and enjoyed the long open-air days ending in tea by the fire, balths and bridge with a "last time" feeling because of the political tension.

The rice fields are mellowing to gold and brown and black, we light the fire in the evenings, the political situation is easier and once the spree<sup>87</sup> is over I think I shall be happy - but there will be more crises by then.

From Menander:

Poor Mortal, never pray to have no griefs  
Pray to have fortitude

Fight not with god, nor to the storm without  
Add your own storms

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Iris's article "Kingdom of Golden Gardens" was published in the *Sunday Statesman* 18th November 1956



What Buranji Tells of the

# Kingdom of Golden Gardens

By I. M.

I READ with great interest Mr A. K. Som's article (The Sunday Statesman of August 19) on the Buranji histories of Assam—histories written for the Ahom kings by their private pundits. I am fortunate enough to be living, at present, among the burial mounds raised over the bodies of many of those kings, and have often walked up the hill on which they built the temple to house their deity, Somdeu, and in which each of the "heavenly kings" was crowned. There is very little left of the temple, only a few pillars overgrown with jungle creepers: the burial mounds rise like dolphin's backs from the sea of tea-bushes that beat around them: the palaces have been burnt down and forgotten.

But as I read the story of the battles and intrigues, the tortures, the animal fights, the omens and the splendour of the

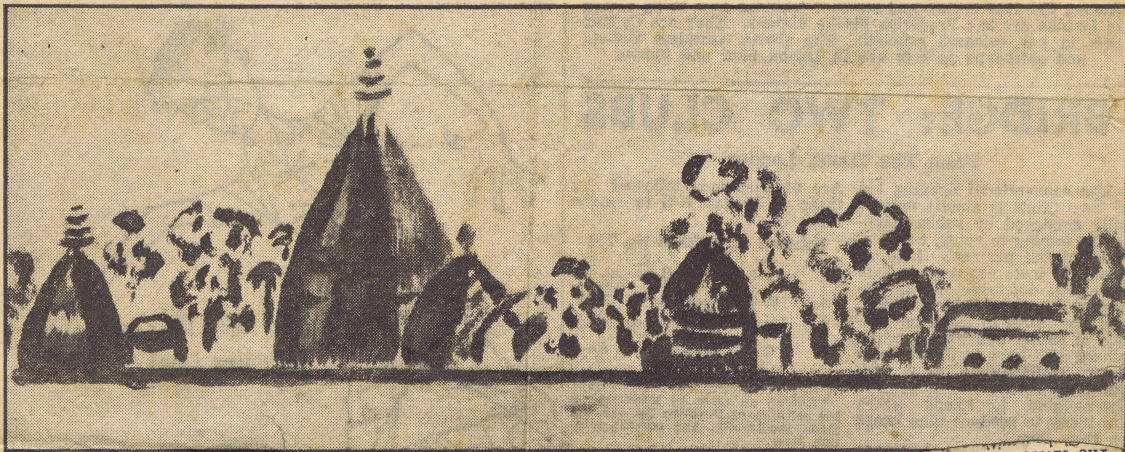
eight otters, seven crows, nine hogs and ten lizards. The ladies left to return to heaven, but the rest of the procession reached the earth safely, only to find that in the confusion the fowls had been forgotten. This was a serious matter: Lengdon had given special instructions that the thigh bones of the heavenly chickens were to be cleaned and used for the calculation of future events. Who would go back for them? Apparently nobody would: the ladder was very, very long. The situation was saved by a local inhabitant who, informed of the impasse, announced: "I will fetch the holy cocks if you will make me king of China," thereby not only restoring confidence all round, but creating for himself an unrepeatable opportunity for a glimpse of heaven. I can't help feeling that he made an excellent king.

From these two gods, Shukapha was descended, and with his arrival in the "country of golden gardens" as he named the luxuriant flowering land around the Brahmaputra, legend becomes history and the Buranji can be relied on for an accurate, if somewhat biased, account of the doings of the royal family. Shukapha brought with him "one tusked elephant, an elephant keeper, and three hundred horses with covered eyes" as well as friends and followers, and of course Somdeu, the royal umbrella and the legs of the heavenly fowls. He first met opposition from a tribe of Nagas, and having defeated them "the king made a younger brother eat the cooked flesh of his elder brother and a father of his son's," which horrible brutality shocked the Nagas into terrified submission and continues to

shock us reading about it after seven hundred years.

It set the note for much that is to follow in the history of the Ahoms: the impaling on bamboos, the branding to death with red-hot hoes, the slow starvation, frying in oil, gouging of eyes and flinging to wild animals. It is hard not to be sickened as one reads of whole families exterminated for the fault of one, or sometimes on a passing whim. But before passing arbitrary judgments we should question our ability to judge at all, standing as we do in a different century, surveying actions out of their climate and context. And it was not a one-sided persecution. The heavenly king and his family suffered as much, if not more, than the common people: rich and poor played the game of life to the same rules. The royal family's only really regrettable habit was that of disfiguring all possible claimants to the throne, due to the law declaring that the person of his majesty must be un-

(Continued on Page III Col. 2.)



An oil sketch (by author) of part of the temple-studded tank at Sibsagar, one of the many beautiful tanks excavated by the Ahoms.

Iris to Alan, 10th Dec 1956 Cherideo

My dear Alan,

*This is your official birthday letter but I haven't the remotest idea when it will arrive, somewhere near the day I hope. It brings lots and lots of love and happy returns from us both (Daddy says he is writing separately!) and wishes for a lovely day. I hope you like our present which we ordered without seeing but trust will be right. Lovely to think I shall be with you for your next birthday and the one after - but rather terrifying to think that after that you'll be grown up - however it happens to us all.*

*I feel wonderful to-day as the Spree is over and there were no noticeable hitches - not in my departments anyway. The decorations were a roaring success, we spent the two days before putting them up and with yards of coloured paper over the booths, and looked most*



*effective, the Merry-go-round was a masterpiece with curly yellow paper to look like brass rods, and the fortune teller in black and purple with gauze curtains and a round lighted ball shining through was good too. Some flashlight photos were taken which I hope came out.*

*Oh dear, my morning has been ruined by a female arriving and nattering and now its half past twelve and the postman champing at the door. However rather than keep this and risk making it late, I'll send it off and write a proper letter in a day or two. Daddy says he has written this morning! I still haven't got the money for my article and am getting distinctly suspicious, yesterday I met a professor of history who had read my article, I asked him if it was all right and he said "Almost" but wouldn't elaborate, so far I haven't had any rude letters though which is surprising. Noddy<sup>88</sup> has gone, I miss him terribly but apparently he is quite happy and doted on by his new owners, Dinah seems to be missing him and has been very quiet and forlorn the last few days.*

*Well I really must get this off or it won't go at all, the wedding photos have arrived<sup>89</sup> and we think them very good except of Richard and Francis who both look terribly grim!  
With much love and happy returns - Mummy*

Iris to her children, Cherideo, 12th December 1956

*Darlings,*

*Although it doesn't seem like Christmas at all here, I think this must be a Christmas letter, knowing how the posts get held up at this time of year. I hope you have a lovely day, I know you will, we shall be thinking of you every minute and wishing we were with you. I expect it will be a quiet day this year as with petrol rationing<sup>90</sup> people won't be able to move around much, but I hope you manage to get to some of the hunts and maybe get some skating, the skates will have moved down one and Alan perhaps be without, we'll have to see what we can do about that, if he needs them urgently he'd better take out some savings money and we'll refund it! But I gather you're going to fish most of the hols Alan, the very thought of sitting by the side of frozen lakes makes me shiver!*

*As I said in Alan's letter, the dreadful Spree is over and the relief is wonderful, I hope I never have to cater for a hundred people again, it was simply chaotic and at one point I thought the simplest thing would be to sit on the floor and scream so that they'd put me away in a nice quiet loony bin for a bit. Of course everything went off all right and there was plenty to eat and the ants only got into the prawn salad where they weren't noticeable and the club cat only removed a few bits of chicken, the decorations really did look nice though I shouldn't say so, Daddy and I and a Mrs Corps<sup>91</sup> who is on this garden went in for two days before and put them up, we covered the frames for the stalls completely with coloured paper in stripes and frills (blast here is someone to see me, will I never get a chance to write letters nowadays) well she's gone but its quarter to twelve.*

*Anyway to resume, we made targets, Aunt Sallies etc. and for the fortune teller we hung purple and black paper all round and white gauze in front with a lighted ball shining through, the Merry-go-round we built round a small bar, we hung black cloth behind the horses and made curly yellow bars from the horses to look like brass, and lots of flags and balloons and so on, at night it looked nice as we turned out all the lights except the ones in the stalls. The ghost train had green lights in it and the skeletons were a great success as everyone that danced past them altered their arms and legs to look much more ridiculous than before, it was rather sad to have to dismantle the whole thing next morning after all the hard work, I thought that as the party progressed everything would be ripped down, but the dance in the evening was a most sedate affair, I think most people were tired after playing tennis or polo all day and I was exhausted from having been on my feet for about eight hours.*

*We went into the club at nine a.m., plus cakes, puddings, Russian salad for a hundred people (you can imagine the size of the saucepan) apple sauce tomatoes and masses else, I had three cooks carving hams and chickens in the background but there were all the salads to make, meringues to fill, tables to arrange etc, at about twelve I thought I would have a stroke or be sick, and at half past everything was ready. Of course I was much too tired and strung up to eat anything myself, but everyone else seemed to enjoy it, ants and all, then there was clearing up to be done, and I got back to the bungalow at 4. Poor Daddy stayed on to help with teas and got back at seven thirty, and we went in again at about nine for the dance.*

*In the evening I was talking to a strange young man whom I discovered (can't remember how it cropped up) to be a friend of Robert's at Sedbergh, David Venters<sup>92</sup> was the name I think, and as far as I could gather he still has a brother there. Robert might be interested. We got home at half past one and slept very well as you can imagine, but for two days afterwards I was terribly tired, sort of anti-climax I suppose, slept most of Sunday and didn't go into the club on Monday, yesterday we were neither of us feeling too good, we had tummy upsets in the night and in the morning Daddy broke out in a mass of wealds all over but we haven't discovered what was wrong.*

*Now I'm back to my quiet routine again, and wishing I could do something to help Granny as there is nothing to prepare for Christmas here. Oh I forgot, on Sunday morning we were invited to the Head Babus wedding, as usual we weren't allowed to see anything of the actual ceremony but were sat down round his drawing room table and offered whisky (at twelve in the morning, shows what a bad reputation the Sahibs have) but after sitting and talking to each other for twenty minutes the Babu brought in a Mr Handiqui<sup>93</sup> who is a well-known historian round here and we had a very interesting talk with him, he was there when they discovered a lot of gold coins in Sibsager recently and he has also opened one of the few tombs that has not been rifled, he said that a little air had been allowed to get into the coffin and the rice and bamboos that had been buried for hundreds of years were still green, they also found gold chests etc - lucky things! he wants Daddy to do some clearing round the temple before the big festival in January so I shall go up with my little trowel and have the odd scrape round. Mr Handiqui said the gold he found was only a foot below the surface. He had read my article and I asked him if it was accurate - "Well almost" he said but was too polite to tell me what wasn't!*

*We got the wedding photos from the Highams<sup>94</sup> the other day and are absolutely thrilled with them, they are very good of everyone except Francis who looks terribly fierce. I'm afraid I also opened the other presents they brought, and love them, the little wooden picture looks sweet on our brick mantle piece, and the pants are exactly what I needed only having two home made pairs! Thank you very much.*

*The postman is here, so I must stop, I will be writing to Granny to-morrow, I hope you'll give her lots of help, I know you will. What about logs with candles and snow on them for decorations, and a kissing ring wound with greenery and coloured ribbons - but I expect you have your own ideas.*

*Lots and lots of love and Christmas wishes to you all - Mummy*

Notebook: 26 Dec 1956 The spree is over, the children's party is over, Christmas is over, and now there is only time between me and Spring in England. The spree was rather a nightmare, enacted against a background of unspoken criticism and splitting headaches, the children's party less tiring to organise but hell to run, with long awkward gaps waiting for the sun to set, and Santa to arrive - I hushed the children with fey references to the jingle of sleigh bells, but the bells never materialised! I suppose the children enjoyed it, as usual the tea was consumed by mothers fathers and bachelors.

On Christmas Eve we went up the river to John Darby's<sup>95</sup> basha. I was very tired and the effort of going was almost too much, but when we were seated by our camp fire with a bottle of rum and a tin of curry puffs we felt it had been worth the effort. John arrived just when we were thinking of turning in and sat for about 2 hours saying "Well I must say this is very very pleasant" and stretching out for another curry puff. Finally got rid of him and went to bed - and had a lovely Christmas night.

Next day we spent fishing (Mac caught a small one) and picnicking with the Corps, the river was as lovely as always, we saw kingfishers, and turtles, cormorants, a wild pig (Mac) and monkeys - also Hazarikas, Baruas and Barkatakis<sup>96</sup> - the latter says he will be very interested to help me with ancient Assamese research! Got back to find tables groaning with oranges and iced cakes - but alas no gold mohurs!

My dahlias are flowering in the front bed and as I sit on the verandah a humming bird squeaks and whirrs in front of them and bees hum. 3 Scarlet Salvias are flowering, a few Calendulas, and nasturtiums. We're eating cauliflowers, carrots, lettuce, peas and beans, the lawn is brown, the egrets have gone, a hen is clucking, and the smell of mimosa is heavy on the afternoon air. I am lucky - but always there is the feeling of bereavement. I must get down to some steady writing.

## 1957

Notebook: 18 Jan [1957] I am sitting on top of the temple hill with my back against a fallen pillar, the sun on my cheeks, the shadow of vultures crossing my head, dogs barking and 3 youths peering over my shoulder. If it wasn't for the youths and the dogs it would be blissfully peaceful - the dun plains, furred with trees, the long white road, the slate blue water and a noise like the hum of myriad bees - made up of voices and cows and birds and chickens and rising in a gentle steam from the plains. The wind is rustling the leaves and rippling the water on the tank, and the villages grouped among the trees look cosy and contained. Below is the chequer work of cut rice - fields with cows drifting across the squares like tiny, aimless counters, enclosed in the embanked walls of the old Ahom gardens.

The temple is looking untidy and exciting, in the process of cleaning and tidying heaps of old bricks have been unearthed and several stone plaques engraved with flowers, a lot of little stone objects were also unearthed but they disappeared. It is heartbreaking to see how little interest is taken in such a fascinating project, the secrets that lie beneath my bottom as I write! I wish I could do something, but shall meet not only lethargy and ignorance from Assam, but positive mistrust from Mac, who doesn't want to become "involved". It doesn't do in his job. But what about me? It is the question of conflicting loyalties, and what is loyalty anyway, and how can it conflict?

Am involved in a difficult and ungrammatical conversation with the 3 youths, my Assamese deserts me on these occasions and the few phrases I produce sound odd when removed from my text book and tossed with into an unreceptive silence. They have just asked if there is jungle in England. Or Assamese? Or Bengalis? What, none of these things - what a weird country!

19th Jan 1957 A great shock as we drove into church this morning - Robert Higham met us with the news that Roger [Werner] was dead. Even as I write it I can't believe it, Roger was such an alive sort of person, it's impossible to imagine life here without him. And hard to conceive the Eternal Plan in leaving a widow and young family. Mac has gone off to help cope, and left me to face Pyoli Phukan<sup>97</sup> on my own, I went down this p.m. all prepared to give my speech, but found it had already been given! So sat for a couple of hours listening to a variety of gentlemen running down the British Raj at terrific length, one of them went on and on for at least an hour, quite undeterred by the fact that the audience was noisily removing itself, he was eventually left with me and a few yawning members of the reception committee. All the speakers had holes in their socks, there were two very fat and greasy Ministers to whom I was introduced, one of them asked me how I thought preservation of ancient monuments could be carried out, I said a chowkidar and started to tell him about the little pots that had been found he wasn't interested, so I went back to the speeches and the only words of which I could understand were "public example" and "Engrazi sahebs".

Yesterday we went down to the exhibition, and were shown a new type latrine and the process of artificial insemination - this by a very earnest young man flashing bottles of semen in and out of Thermos flasks and staring up the vaginas of imaginary cows. I had to look at the semen through a microscope but was little the wiser and somewhat embarrassed. We also saw the process of silk-making from the beginning, when the crystallises are boiled and the thread wound off them, to the last stages of wearing the cloth.

Also saw some old Assamese pots, and a couple of coins, and a sword and a brass dragon which must have been very old and a copper plate from the time of Rudra Sing. The python was incongruously mixed up in all this, "your serpent has much diminished" as Mr Handiqui told me sadly. In the evening there was a variety show, some good dancing and in between



some appalling old men droning into the microphone while other older and dirtier men skipped girlishly across my second best carpet. This was followed by an oriental dance party with one very good male dancer, and gay choruses of bashful maidens who surprisingly broke into deep bass song. To-day a girl gave a dance called "The 10 lives of god" which depicted the stages of evolution and was very graceful. What a mixed up week-end, I feel tired and depressed - Pyoli Phukan, Roger - into the earth with them, the ground will settle, the jungle will cover, and all the depressions and fights and failures will be forgotten. But some spirit lives on, to infect a bunch of grubby men with holes in their socks, to infect me; to continue in Roger's children and in theirs; to weave itself into some plan.

Iris's article in the *Sunday Statesman* on "Ancient Kingdoms of Ahoms" was published 10th February 1957.

**The Sunday Statesman**  
CALCUTTA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 10 1957

## ANCIENT KINGDOM OF AHOMS

By I. M.

THEY came over the hills from Burma in the 13th century, a Tai prince and his followers, and discovered a mighty river, lush pastures, a profusion of fruit and flowers; a country of silk and shellac, sesame, musk, cloves, saffron and sandalwood. A "country of cocoon rears" - so they named this new land Mungdunsunkham "full of golden gardens" and accepted for themselves, after various scuffles, the title Ahom or "under-

bedchamber, inflicted fatal wounds on the royal person and escaped. After all his exertions he must have been bitterly disappointed to find it was the queen mother he had mistakenly murdered.

If we climb the four staircases to the tiny platform at the top of the palace, we may be lucky enough to see the view, as I did on my first visit, against a back cloth of purple cloud and double rainbow. We cannot explore the

lost, and in spite of three days' search remained untraced. As a result the British closed the entrance to prevent further misadventures. The fugitives that tunnel must have sheltered! The amorous and treacherous intrigues it surely encouraged! How exciting it could be reopened.

Past Garhgaon runs the Dodhar Ali—the Road of Sloths—built by energetic Gadhadur Sing. Hounded in his youth, Gadhadur Sing escaped the persecution meted out to the rest of his royal relations by his predecessor and mounted the throne in 1681, to become a tireless surveyor and builder of bridges and roads; a forceful, massive monarch whose favourite dish was spring rice and a calf roasted in ashes. The sloths in question were gosains of the Moamaria sect. Gadhadur Sing held a personal grudge against many of them for refusing to shelter him in his vagrant days, and his ears were wide open to the tales of their laziness and of the religious airs they assumed to exonerate themselves from taking part in his programme of building and fighting.

He sent his officers round to investigate their claims and in no time had them digging the vast embanked road that runs through Assam to this day. The situation got out of hand and a full scale persecution of the gosains was afoot. How far Gadhadur Sing turned a blind eye to the looting and murder perpetrated in his name it is hard to say. Eventually he called a halt to the horrors, but the seeds had been sown for the Moamaria revolt that later destroyed the Ahom monarchy, and nearly destroyed the country.

Garhgaon is a sad palace, but Rangpur, basking under a winter sun with honey-coloured rice fields lapping round it, is enchanting. Built on many levels with unexpected courtyards and corners and arched stairways, its air of tranquillity was the background of a rebellion on a grand scale and came to an undignified end when many of its bricks were removed by the East India Company for building bungalows. On the afternoon I visit-

ed its birds performed an aerial ballet above the mellow walls and a soft-spoken chowkidar tut-tutted my suggestion that elephants were stabled in the huge underground vaults. "Military," he reproved, "not elephants in the Rajah's house."

Imagination conjures up many pictures: of the three Europeans who visited it in 1739 to pay their respects to king Siva Sing, and "falling prostrate at his feet offered him five packets of needles"; of an officer of State, Kirti Barbarua, who was set on at its gates and narrowly escaped assassination, a pity, for he was responsible for the burning of many old Buranji histories, vandalism for which he received the king's permission when aspersions were cast on his own and the royal family tree, but for which it is hard to forgive him: of the nauseating end of a rebel leader when "the king made to press Noma's feet head

and hands and breast and then cut his body to pieces with a dagger." Two kings fled down its subterranean passages, the second Gaurinath Sing, leaving the precious deity Somdet behind in his haste. The jewelled god came to an obscure end in a Calcutta bazaar.

The palace was occupied by the upstart clan, relieved by a small British contingent, taken over by the brutal Burmese, besieged, desecrated and finally sold by a contractor—but shows no signs of its unhappy past. The sense of peace that pervades it tempts one to spend the whole day with one's back against warm brick quoting Persian poetry—only half a mile away is Joy-sager tank, the biggest in India, backed by blue hills and carrying the reflections of the burnt temples on its banks. This was built by Rudra Sing, the great in memory of his mother.

(Continued on Page II Col. 4)



Afternoon of an Ahom king. An oil painting by author.

feated." Thus Assam was called after its first conquerors.

They brought with them a new god in a jewelled box, the knowledge of gunpowder, the practice of burying their dead in vaults (learnt from days they lived on the trade routes with Egypt) and most important of

three underground storeys as the entrance to them has been blocked. There was a tunnel, ten miles long and wide enough for elephants, leading from this to the later palace at Rangpur. The story goes that a hundred men who set out to explore it were



Rudra Singh the Great rides for ever round the temple he constructed. An oil painting by author.



Notebook: 22nd Mar 1957 So it is Spring again - the yellow silk cotton in flower, with the purple bougainvillea rampaging up it - banksias justifying their long bareness by dressing in disarming pink frills, the Persian Lilac dusted with powdery blossom, portulaca glittering like gobs of glitter wax among the lilies, and a delicious warm smell carried from the blossoms of lime and pomelowa. Birds chatter hysterically, new butterflies appear each day and every brown twig suddenly furred with green. It isn't as exciting as Spring at home but noisier and gayer in an exotic way. My hens are laying 3 eggs a day.

Iris was leaving for England from Calcutta, flying by B.O.A.C. on 27th March.

Notebook: 26th Mar 1957 Calcutta - No spring here; burning feet, pavements that smell of spit and urine, bullocks in the gutters, taxi horns, bookstalls full of the Kinsey Report and Forever Amber - grubby, shabby, impossible place, how can anyone live here? Even the Newmarket has lost its glamour now that the children aren't here to see it with me. The only beautiful thing I've seen here is a battalion of mounted police, but to-morrow I shall go to the Buddhist Exhibitions to soothe my nerves. Everybody in the hotel is dull and fat, the women dressed in tight white Broderie Anglaise - the men in creased Hawaiian shirts. I've been tramping round all day trying to find cheap, light, "Eastern" presents haven't been very successful except for the cheapness. Feel rather drab, lonely and flat at the moment, this being neither here nor there is trying, thank goodness I have E.M. Forster. A shopkeeper greeted me "Good afternoon, you are old friend, old customer. How are things in Kathmandu?"

Iris to Donald 26th Mar 1957 [Calcutta, Oberoi Grand]

*Darling,*

*V. early in the morning, the sun isn't up yet so I don't like to ask for my tea but I shall in a minute. I had a good flight down, we waited ages at Gauhati, don't know why. Hazarika, Lila Gogoi<sup>98</sup> and I making frantic effort at conversation for about 45 minutes - we didn't get to Calcutta till about 12.15. It was a nice solid four-engined Skymaster, I was only terrified about half the time when we had to climb up and down through the monsoon. Hannah met me and we were home in no time, the Bank wouldn't give him my box in spite of my letter so I shall have to waste time going there to-day. Calcutta is quite cool more so than Assam, this place is full of Yanks and Germans. I didn't think it worth going to the library yesterday evening so did some shopping including your swimming pants, the largest they have but still look a bit undersized to me - you can change them when you come if necessary. I got them at Bright and McIvor in the hotel arcade. Came back footsore to a whisky and bath and dinner in my room - had that chicken thing we had in the Bar-b-Que but it wasn't so nice - my tummy is a little uneasy and I can't seem to eat much which is a waste. Only boob so far is that my whisky flask leaked all over "Aurangzeb"<sup>99</sup> and it now has large brown stains on most of its pages and smells like mad, hope the library won't be too cross. To-day I'm going to the Bank and then onto the library which closes at 5 p.m. So I shall probably take sandwiches and stay there all day. The snag is taxis but it isn't very far I don't think. Just called for tea, the Bearer said "One tea?" in a most surprised voice, this is a double room so perhaps he thought I was harbouring a man, or ought to be! I bought the girls sandals and Alan a black shirt, to go with his tie, it looked very nice, sort of homespun, but when I opened it I found the back was different, just plain cheap cotton - got it in a big shop near here too. Every second oily little man sidles up and hisses that he'll buy my pound notes. Bearer has just told me its only 5.30 a.m.*



*Evening: A busy but successful day - I did a bit more shopping and then went to the bank - the hitch is because Kilburn's said "Mr Macfarlane's trunk" in their letter so after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing they said I could have it if you wrote a confirmatory letter. Will you do that? I have to get the receipt from Hannah and Collect it in the morning. Went into the library which is heaven, everyone frightfully helpful and thrilled to have someone from the Grand Hotel visiting them! They provided several of my books, and I worked from 11-4 with only half an hours break for my cheese sandwiches under a tree - even then only took inadequate notes on one book. I was beginning to feel rather ill by then what with the heat and nothing to drink since breakfast and no Toilet - was also afraid I'd have to walk home but I got a taxi and after a bath and tea sallied forth to the New Market where I finished my shopping and was too tired to stop myself being robbed. Don't suppose I'll have much time for the library to-morrow with this trunk to cope with, they are a lot of drips at Grindlays. I will hand over spare cash to Hannah to send you, will pay for your trunks. The old band is thumping away outside, same old tunes, same old palm trees and hot breeze and smell of cooking. I haven't spoken to a soul since I got here, quite restful, but odd.*

*Am very tired so no more for now darling, will finish this in the morning. Will you give the enclosed to Daphne sometime?*

*4 p.m. I had a busy morning, getting my box from the bank and packing as much as I could - the key wouldn't fit so we tried to break it open and ended by breaking the latch thing. I've taken all the letters and some silver - left all the bulky things for you - Coffee and tea set! But if you can't be bothered leave them behind with Hannah. My suitcase has developed a hole in one corner and I didn't like to fill it any further. Then went off to the library and spent a long time waiting for my money - only to be handed a cheque on the reserve bank - Hannah will have to cope once more! That all took up my morning, after lunch was just dozing when the phone rang and I had the most peculiar conversation - a heavily lecherous voice with a strong French accent asking how I was - when I asked who was speaking he said "Ze Devil" - honestly it was like an old Charles Boyer film. I couldn't help giggling when he asked if he could come down and see me. I said I was sorry and suggested he try seducing somebody else! Afterwards I realised I should have involved him just to see who it was. Some dotty creature who got hold of room numbers of unaccompanied women I suppose. Anyway that was the end of my sleep and I don't suppose I shall get any to-night, the weather looks a bit grisly, lots of cloud, wish I was back with you and not having to fly off alone into the night. You'll be playing your football this afternoon, I wonder what you'll do to-morrow, I meant to go to the zoo about Tony's [Connell] leopard but haven't got round to it, seem to spend so much time in traffic jams, had a more than usually crazy taxi-driver this morning who didn't know his way anywhere and spent most of the time leaning out of the window telling tram drivers that their mothers were descended from pigs.*

*Must finish my packing, pay bills and other chores. Hannah is coming for me at six. He wants to know where your passport was issued, he doesn't think Mon? will be able to get home as he has a passport issued out here and hasn't remitted money for years - he says we must get new British issued passports.*

*I'm missing you very much darling, and worrying about you and the animals, hope they're not being a nuisance. Will write as soon as I arrive this time to-morrow, fantastic thought. Loving you lots - look after yourself darling - All love - Totty*

Iris arrived back in England on 28th March. The letters for this year are from Field Head, and details of this time, including the brief return of Donald for the summer - he flew from Calcutta to London on 16th July and arrived back in Assam 14th October - are described in *Lakeland Life*. Iris remained in England until January 1958.

Iris to Donald from Field Head, Sunday 17th November 1957

[Most of the letter concerns life in England]

*.....I'm glad the compound's coming on, does the Assamese tilery in front look nice? I'm beginning to go through my Assamese books again with a view to taking up my studies on arrival. Will you lay on a teacher for me? Have you been up to the temple? Will you also get Rosemary's address for me. I'll send her a card. Are they getting a new accountant or will Sawtell cope? What a lot of questions - please answer them darling. I'll send your Christmas card in my next letter, usual home-made effort! I ordered the Turkey to-day and am going to make the pudding to-morrow, Daddy keeps saying gloomily how he hates Christmas, but as he doesn't have to do a thing towards it we're rather brusque! I wonder what you'll do, go up the river? Do you remember last year, sitting by the camp fire with John Darby eating all our curry puffs and saying "Well I must say this is very pleasant"! And do you remember how cold I got in that horrid little camp bed in the night?! We must have a week-end in the basha after I arrive, book it darling. Before it gets too warm so I have an excuse to get into your bed.*

*Keep loving me, as I do you, always my dearest - Totty*

## 1958

Iris returned to India 23rd January.



Iris in front of Cherideo bungalow with Dinah and Candy and the Humber car.

Iris to Alan, late January 1958 Cherideo

*Dear Alan,*

*A week since I left, and I feel as if I'd been gone a year at least. I'm sitting on the verandah in a cotton shirt with the sun beating down, birds singing, butterflies flying and an overpowering smell of mimosa. Nothing has changed at all and I sometimes wonder if I've been away at all!*

*I hope you got my postcards en route, I had to leave them with the awful looking rogues who sold them to me to post, so I don't know if they ever got off. As I mentioned, I travelled in a Qantas super Constellation, divided into 3 cabins with the 1st Class Passengers lounging in their slumberettes at the back and us crowded into the nose. The journey was completely uneventful and dull, except that we were thrown out both nights and got practically no sleep. We were held up from 1-3 a.m. at Karachi and I was shown a room with a bed in it, I lay down and immediately fell fast asleep - woke to dead silence and thought I had slept for hours, the plane would be well on its way to Calcutta - but it was only 10 minutes later!*

*Calcutta was like an oven, not a breath of air and the temperature at 89 degrees, I went to the hotel at 10 a.m. had a bath, and slept till 5.15! I was jolly glad to get out of the place next morning, another featureless flight and I arrived at Jorhat at mid-day. Daddy was looking*

very well in spite of stories he told me of tummy upsets, slipped discs, groggy knees etc! Dinah and Candy looked tiny compared to Juno, Candy knew me at once and was thrilled to have someone back to let her get on chairs and beds, Dinah has now accepted me but is still out with Daddy all day. I got a cold just before I left which made my ears ache terribly on the plane and I had to go to bed when I got here with interesting pains in the chest, spent one day with Daddy and doctors ministering to me and then recovered which was rather dull.

It is most peculiar having nothing to do all of a sudden, and I must confess I am very homesick. I shall start my digging next week to occupy myself, and the old Assam inertia will do the rest. We're going up to the river this afternoon, there is now a road from this end which sounds rather nice. To-morrow we're going fishing with the General Manager and some V.I.P. he has staying. Would you believe it, I left my fishing rod behind, I saw it in the corner of your room but I was so certain Daddy had taken it I didn't even look if it was mine! You'll have to bring it out at Christmas.

On reading this through I don't seem to have said much about the journey out, but Rome you know and Athens was very disappointing, just airport and a breakfast specially prepared for us by Archbishop Makarios<sup>100</sup> himself I think - the most revolting I've ever had! The only interesting bit was flying over the Tigris and Euphrates.

How's the guitar? I'm going shopping for a mandolin or something similar, and shall probably have to ask you to give me some chords as I don't suppose I'll get any books here. Hope to have a large fish to report in my next - I won't forget the money for your Licences. With love from us all,  
Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 7th February 1958

Dear Alan,

Thank you for the long letter [of 26th January] which Granny forwarded - with the astounding revelations about Stowe! If David gets uppish you can always throw the 5 jail birds at him! I hope your cold improved, Granny had a beastly one too, and I've only just managed to throw mine off. What a shocking thing, the plane crash we've just heard of killing half Manchester United, it'll cause a furore at home - I'm glad Danny Blanchflower survived.<sup>101</sup>

It's like the monsoon here, rain and thunder - inches of rain - and everyone moaning about the cold though it's hardly cold to me. We had our day up the river before it started I'm glad to say, I got a fish on with my second cast and just had time to say "I've got a fish" - when I hadn't! The water was warm and it looked just right but 3 of us fished from 9.30 a.m. to lunch time without success. At 1 o'clock we came to the rapid where I lost my big fish, Daddy wanted to press on but I said "Come on, there's a 6-lber waiting for us here". I took the best place just below the rapid - but it was Daddy who hooked the fish. It gave him quite a fight and he played it for about 10 minutes - and when he landed it and weighed it - it was exactly 6 - lbs! Unfortunately we hadn't got the camera - a good thing in a way as we were sitting in the bottom of a dug-out and were soaked coming down the rapids.

I found it a bit hot and got a splitting headache but luckily had gone well-supported with aspirin - the man in the other boat had sunstroke next day we heard. The river was lovely as usual, full of cormorants and kingfishers and the tracks of wild elephants and we were planning where we'd camp next Christmas when you're out. We can now get to the river from this side along a new road they've made into the Naga hills, which is much quicker, and on Sunday we're going to take a rubber boat along to try it out, it's been lying on the verandah for the last year so will probably sink like a stone.

*I've spent 2 afternoons this week digging up at the temple, the jungle has romped up to it again, covering all my previous work which is a bit depressing, but Daddy says he'll let me have some men to clear it and start again. Its so nice up on the temple hill, only me and Dinah and a couple of vultures who are nesting there and peer down on us most suspiciously - or perhaps hungrily. I still find the days rather long but will gradually get back into the old routine I suppose. There's a film on at the club to-morrow - "The Cobweb" - and I'm looking forward to seeing what Nazira P.O. can do in the way of Cinemascope! I saw "Great Expectations" when it first came out, wasn't that the one with the absolutely terrifying opening scene in the graveyard?*

*Daddy and I listened to Scotland play Wales at Rugger, sad that Scotland just can't get a good enough team but it was exciting. I'm going to install croquet and clock golf on my tennis lawns, being more appropriate to my age and status - so you can tell David we have a croquet lawn and a golf course as well - sucks!*

*That seems about the lot, the dogs are well though Candy in a state of nervous prostration over the thunder.*

*Much love from us all Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 14th February 1958

*My dear Alan,*

*I am waiting for some guests (General Manager and friends) to arrive, they are coming for the day and are already half an hour late, me having been dashing round since dawn cracked to get everything organised for them. daddy is striding up and down the verandah like a caged lion growling about all the work he should be doing, so I've retired into the dressing room with my typewriter and having sat myself down to write they will surely arrive. I hope you don't mind typed letters, I find it so much easier and quicker but some people don't like getting them so say so if you're one of them. Here they are, I told you so.*

*Well this is the next day, the lunch party turned out to be a bit of an ordeal but quite funny to talk about after, they left at three and Daddy and I went and lay down on our beds and had mild hysterics for half an hour. One of the guests was an old, retired tea planter who has recently written the history of the Assam Company,<sup>102</sup> but he had with him his landlady who he is taking on a world tour and she was a fearful creature with a great thick neck, fat white hands flashing enormous diamond rings, beady little eyes darting in all directions (from years of seeing that nobody spread their margarine too thick) and a bright red wig.*

*We started by taking them on a drive round the garden in the land rover which is singularly without springs and I was sitting in the back and quite fascinated to watch the wig being jerked out of place at every bump, unfortunately she had skewered it to her head with enormous hairpins and then riveted the lot down with a straw hat so the chances of it being dislodged were remote but one could always hope. When we got back to the bungalow she retired to the bathroom for half an hour, presumably to re-cement the whole structure!*

*Then we had drinks, we sat in a circle in the drawing room and bandied chit-chat, the old man was very deaf so at intervals she leant across the circle and bellowed at him "THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT THE CRESTA RUN AND THE COST OF LIVIN." and then of course we couldn't think of another things to say about either and a deathly hush fell until we got onto another topic going and she shrieked "THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT HIGHLAND CATTLE". – and so on. Finally she and I had a fierce argument about the royal family which would have ended in blows if Daddy hadn't called for lunch.*

*There were no crises at lunch except a shortage of carrots, and they left fairly soon afterwards, I was sorry I hadn't been able to talk to old Mr Antrobus in peace, I'm sure he wasn't as deaf as she made out and he is a great student of Assamese history. I'm sure she*



*will get him to sign all his money over to her and then mix rat poison into his sandwiches like the woman who is being tried at home now.*

*This week has gone more quickly than the last and I seem to be finding ways of occupying myself. I go up to the temple and dig every afternoon from two to four, the day before yesterday I discovered some more little pots, or to be more accurate one of the men Daddy has given me to help discovered them, I saw him tossing something over his shoulder and immediately let out a scream and started burrowing like a badger, he looked at me in amazement and wasn't at all impressed with the other little pots I dug up.*

*Unfortunately people are beginning to drift up to see what is going on and they amuse themselves by hacking at the walls I have uncovered and pulling out bricks and breaking them, if it goes on I shall have to stop as its better to leave it covered than have it destroyed. It makes me mad. They are mostly Teddy Boy gangs, we met a whole crowd of them going up and as they passed us they made rude remarks in Assamese which they thought we didn't understand, Daddy was so angry he went to their jeep, opened the bonnet and did something to the works which ensured that they would have to push it home!*

*I have spent quite a lot of the week trying to make bread, having pounded up and down the kitchen stairs for several days in the effort to produce three leaden loaves the cook mentioned that he and been making bread for years and suggested that he try!*

*On Monday I made my debut at the club, we went in to see a film on the new Cinemascope. The film "The Cobweb" was all about a lunatic asylum in which the patients were remarkably sane and the doctors and their wives quite mad, it wasn't very good. The new wide screen is quite impressive but the sound is too loud for such a small room and it makes it hard to hear.*

*Nobody has changed at all and I find it hard to know what to talk to them about as they take no interest in what goes on in the world and have never even heard of Wyatt Earp or Matt Dillon.*



Photos taken from the burial mound of Ahom Kings above Cherideo





*Our only other activity this week was to go to a wedding reception, it was an Assamese wedding and had been going on for five days by the time we got there and as neither the bride nor groom are allowed to eat during that time they were speechless with tiredness and hunger. However they had to sit around and watch us stuffing our-selves with delicious curries while an Indian Police band played "Scotland the Brave" and then we went home. I had driven Daddy there, protesting loudly all the way, because I said that nobody else would go and it was up to us to represent the European community, and then we found the place swarming with Europeans and not an Indian in sight.*

*We are getting excited about our week's camping on the Manas river, we're going up on the 28th of this month and return on the 7th. We have to cross the Brahmaputra and its supposed to be one of the best, if not the best, fishing river in Assam, and also has duck shooting and lots of wild life close by (not too close I hope). We are going to see how it would be as a place for you to go when you come out, it might be fun to have a Christmas camp there if the fishing really is good. I haven't forgotten the money for your licences, we are held up by not having a cheque book but I'll get it to you in time. I'm sorry about the guitar string, perhaps you could write to some shop yourself about it. I haven't yet got my instrument but I am going up to Dibrugarh next week and hope to find something then. (in pen) "Wake up little Suzy" still at the top here, with "April Love" second and "With you on my mind" (Nat King Cole and my favourite) third. Tommy Steele, Paul Anka and Co. don't seem to have registered here.*

*Hope the Junior Rugger went off well, and the boxing, I don't know if I approve of that nasty rough game!  
Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: Feb 15th 1958 So I've missed [ie. not written about] the whole summer holidays (rain & the Telly) & the Autumn and Christmas & London with the children – how sad, so much of it will be forgotten. Now, sitting under the mimosa tree, with green pigeons squabbling & bees humming, I am sick with longing for bare oak trees and snow on the hills

– how contrary one is, reading back to this time last year. I find this is what I wanted. The air is warm & heavy, a wagtail picks his way across the lawn, black mimosa pods lie in the grass like slugs, small tickly feet run over my knees – At home this Sunday would find me full of Yorkshire pudding by the fire with the Brains Trust<sup>103</sup> & the Sunday Papers instead of full of curry with the smell of mimosa & the slow thing dropping of rubber leaves. The first thing that struck me was the utter emptiness, nothing to do, no urge to do it – my senses tuned to a different way of life & unreceptive. Now I am slowly finding my way back into this kind of life, & soon I shall be able to think of England without pain, even with disinterest. The two things I notice most are the lack of freshness in the air & the lack of conversation, the club was like a morgue, and everywhere I go I find people utterly without interest except in the clothes I've brought back.

London – the tube maps, the trays of tea by the fire in the evening, the search for shortie pyjamas & “National Velvet”, the twang of Guitar strings, the café lunches, the nightmarish journey in taxi with Fiona writhing in my lap & the blind taxi-man.

The flight. The rather dull young doctor, the man from the Lebanon who had no health certificates, & wasn't going to pay any excess baggage. Rome – cold & wet; Athens, sunrise over the mountains but the airport crumbling & the breakfast uneatable – my ears aching, cold streaming and two fat Australian girls at the table. Bahrain – the first warm wind with the smell of spices in it – a smell that is both sweet & painful. Karachi – a four hour wait, a brief, deep sleep, tiredness, depression, swollen feet, catarrh. Calcutta – leaden warmth, a bath, & a dead tiredness that kept me asleep all day, blessedly blotting out the heat & the thousands of miles between me & the children. Next day – Dum-dum, unmistakable planters with golf-bags & Clydeside voices, the Edyes at Tezpur & then Mac – and a feeling that at last I had arrived & that was better than to travel fretfully. The bungalow, cool and big, the compound, dry & gay & enormous, the dogs tiny & pointed. And Time to fill. I have been digging every afternoon at my temple, making bread, writing a little, feeding my broodies & trying to fight back the terrible lethargy that overpowers me. The purple bougainvillea is out beneath the simul, plum-tree is bridal, sweet peas just over, yellow jasmine is better than ever before. I must start to write seriously, to learn my Assamese & to keep a grip of my lazy instincts. A ruby beetle is basking on a blade of grass. Cobwebs glitter, the pigeons mew like cats, rustle & whirr away, doves coo, goats bleat. Another Sunday afternoon drifts by.

Iris wrote a semi-fictional account of her return journey, and the daily routine at a tea garden in a 'Letter from Assam' which was clearly meant for publication. She changed the names of our family and the Australian tourists are not mentioned in either her letters or notebook.

### *Letter from Assam*

So I am back: via Rome and Athens and Bahrain: across the dry- Indian landscape: over the hills into Assam: here on my verandah, dazed and homesick. Air Travel, which sounds so exotic, resolves itself into minor irritations and major boredoms: into cricks in the neck - swollen feet, iron bars of indigestion. Into Erle Stanley Gardner<sup>104</sup> - earache - long waits in the plane for the only Toilet - long waits at airports for fogs to lift at other airports ahead. And finally into utter exhaustion.

My memory presents Rome to me as cold midnight and puddles on the runway: Athens, after a brief glimpse of sunrise behind the mountains and a grey silk sea, as soggy cornflakes and hard, bright orange eggs: Bahrain as a warm breeze with spices in it, the first smell of the East. Karachi is warmer and the bitter-sweet sensation grows, the not knowing if this is home-coming or banishment. Calcutta steams in a familiar glare, and during the drive

from Dum Dum Airport the love/hate relationship is established. It is so awful but so familiar – the pink, peeling buildings, the pink, peeling dogs, the humped cows, the Pharmacies, the smell of dust and dung. I am dumped, the plane flies on without me. No more plastic trays and competent stewardesses. I must cope with Calcutta on my own.

I feel sad to say good-bye to the passengers I have got to know so well. To the two Australian ladies who leapt on the plane at Athens fresh from climbing the Parnassus, brimming with vitality and books on Renaissance Italy. At Karachi they cling to me and ask my opinion as to what is safe for them to eat. They have been told that almost everything in India gives you cholera or plague or both. "Look at that man PEELING AN ORANGE" the dark one whispers fearfully, and the fair, fading one hisses back reassuringly "He'll probably come to an awful end dear". They are to spend a week in Calcutta "seeing India" and, presumably starving. My last sight of them is being bundled into the Airport bus, their immaculate luggage and shiny straw hats looking a little incongruous among the bedding rolls and baskets of hens.

Then the young doctor who sat beside me, talking, sleeping, sweating, and yawning through the thirty six hours. He was emigrating, he told me, and never expected to return to England. He watched the lights of London Airport fade without a pang. He had made up his mind and he didn't believe in wasting time in regrets, he said. He was right of course, looking back in anger or regret is terribly time-wasting. I wish I was as strong-minded, I wish I wasn't sitting here with the sun on my knees and the smell of mimosa heavy in the air and looking back to winter afternoons in England: sick with longing for bare oaks and salt green evening skies and ice on the milk bottles; and fish-hooks in the Hoover, and stamp hinges and washboards clanging...

But I am here, in my beehive bungalow on a Tea Estate in North India, so I must get used to it again. The trouble is I shoot such a line about my life "out East" that I almost convince myself – and when my "staff of twelve" resolves itself into two dim-witted bearers and a deaf cook in a balaclava cap through which, I suspect, he strains the soup – well, its something of a shock. There are others, of course. There is the old lady who looks after my dozen and a half hens and picks up the leaves from under the teak tree: there are four gardeners who prop up the tomatoes and pick up the leaves from the rubber tree: there is the car boy who polishes the Humber till it gleams like a guardsman's boot and collects the eggs the hens lay on the stable roof: there is a man who slides dreamily round the polished verandahs on bits of cloth: there are two men who wash up and hide cigarettes behind their ears: there is a man who carries away my sheets every week, slaps them on rocks, and brings them back very stiff and white and smelly. These, with the two bearers who wait at table, and the cook, contrive to keep the bungalow running for Mike and me.

The days at first are endless. How to fill the ten hours after the cook has been seen and my undies washed and the flowers arranged? Gradually a pattern emerges. I rise as soon as the sun gilds the mosquito-proofing on my bedroom door, and step into a world of cobwebs and dew. A lace table cloth, worked with glass beads, is spread over the tennis court. The two little fir trees by the gate are winking in Christmas splendour with blue and pink and silver balls. The cat crouches under them, a statue in black and white marble. He is waiting to catch a tree rat; he has waited in that same spot every morning for five years without losing heart.

I pick some small, pale roses and a few sprigs of jasmine, throw corn for the hens, and its breakfast. We eat on the front verandah among pots of trembling ferns and the piercing mimosa smell which some people find sickly, but which I adore. A hummingbird clinks in the dahlias, doves start to coo, the dogs gleam on the red cement floor and Radio Ceylon's Commercial Service warns us that under-arm hair traps perspiration. The day is set in its groove.

This week my mornings have been dedicated to bread making. The local bakery has been providing us with two wizened loaves the colour and consistency of old tennis balls: so I bought a tin of yeast. I have frequently read that making bread is a lot easier than it sounds and the picture on the outside of the tin was encouraging – a beaming, white-coated chef holding up a fat, golden loaf. I pictured Mike's face as he cut through the first crisp slice. I practised that toothy, triumphant smile. I set off for the kitchen with my yeast and salt and sugar and flour, humming gaily.

The kitchen is a separate building and has twenty eight steps leading up to it. I climbed them once to mix the yeast and sugar and set aside – once to add the flour and set aside – once to knead and divide and set aside – once to put in the tin and set aside. Morning wore into afternoon and at three o'clock I opened the oven door to pull out my first golden loaves, toothy smile trembling on my lips.

They cowered in their tins the two of them, mud brown and surly. I carried them like bits of lead to the table and tapped them "to see if they are ready" as the tin helpfully advised. They moaned dully. However, the smell was encouraging and I felt a capable little woman as I carried them down to the bungalow to cool. My friends' voices rang in my ears: "Have you tasted Iris's bread? My dear it's delicious, so versatile isn't she?" The loaves squatted in their tins and sneered.

Mike came in to tea rubbing his hands expectantly. The bearer carried in one of the loaves, surrounded it with plates of butter, jam, cheese and tomatoes, and tactfully withdrew. The loaf looked even more stunted out of the tin but Mike said kindly: "It tastes good, I bet" and attacked it with the bread knife. It braced its muscles, humped its horrid grey-brown back, grunted, and refused to budge. Mike sawed grimly. I clenched my fists. The loaf remained bloody but unbowed.

At last Mike said: "Well we can use it for putting the weight darling" and laughed. I said: "It's the flour, I can't do anything with this awful flour" and burst into tears. The loaf was still sneering so I kicked it into the bird-bath and it sank like a stone. And in spite of the muffled cries and curses I was sure I heard, I refused to rescue it.

This performance, with minor variations, was repeated for the next three days. Every morning I climbed the stairs to the kitchen with hope and confidence: every afternoon staggered down them with leaden bread, on the fourth day I was just preparing to rip the smug chef off the outside of the yeast tin and stamp on him, when the cook cracked his knuckles and said gently that he had been baking bread for years and should he make some? Dazed, I gave him the yeast and sugar and flour and exactly an hour and a half later he placed two white, soft loaves at my elbow. They tasted as good as they looked but I won't demean myself by asking him how he made them, I'll stick to drop scones and tomato chutney.

I have written this through a long, sun-drenched afternoon. There were letters from the children at lunch time: Annabelle<sup>105</sup> wants a picture of Paul Anka or a horse: Phyllida wants shortie pyjamas with red hearts on them: Andrew wants a motor scooter and don't say he's too young because practically every boy in the house has one. I read their letters three times through, then sat on them firmly and started to write. The spotted dove has come to drink from the bird bath, and the big lizard who stands in primeval poses and lets big drops of water roll slowly down his neck. A magpie robin searches the tennis court for insects, monstrous tar-barrel crows shout at each other, green pigeons mew like cats in the trees.

A vulture flies in slow, widening circles overhead; tiny tickly feet run over my knees; the first of the rose-bodied swallow tails drifts past. The simul branches are covered with gobs of red glitter wax, and one by one the leaves float down from the rubber tree. Time - as the Hindus believe - is naught.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 23rd February 1958

*Dear Alan,*

*No letter this week but it'll probably arrive to-day. I hope your cold and throat didn't finally lay you low. Here another week has slipped by and I find to my astonishment that I arrived in India a month to-day, if the time continues to go as quickly as this it'll be no time at all till I see you all again.*

*Not a very eventful week, it's been raining and hailing and thundering and I haven't been able to go up to the temple except two days, I feel I'm on the verge of all sorts of discoveries but also that I'm going to have to give it up altogether as every time I go back I find the local louts have been pulling down the walls and chucking the bricks about - it breaks my heart but there is nothing I can do about it.*

*On Monday Mrs Corps, who lives in the outgarden bungalow, and her 11 year old son came up with me and we had lunch up there, they said they were interested in the temple but all they wanted to do was find gold coins or other loot and it was all I could do to stop them pulling down the walls in their efforts.*

*Its getting too hot now to dig in the afternoon, and soon I shall have to get up at five if I want to get any done, shall probably switch my attentions to one of the smaller temples which are hidden in fairly thick jungle and won't attract the Teddy Boys.*

*I went up on Friday afternoon and was scraping and shovelling great heaps of wet mud and thinking that perhaps archaeology wasn't as exciting as I thought when I suddenly came across a beautiful carved brick in the middle of all the other plain ones, it had a lovely sort of lotus design raised on it and a little symbolic figure on the top. I prized it out and brought it home, I would have left it only I knew if I did it wouldn't be there when I got back. Now I can't wait to get back to find others (can't think what's happened to my typing to-day).*

*Yesterday I went up to Dibrugargh to do some dull shopping, ridiculous that one has to drive for two hours to get a pair of dark glasses and a Thermos flask. I went from shop to shop asking for dark glasses and nobody had heard of them, I was giving up in despair when some bright assistant said "You want sun goggles?" and produced twenty pairs on the spot! I took Mrs Corps and Timmy up with me and we had a picnic lunch by the side of the Brahmaputra, it was rather smelly and we had to fight off a herd of cows which kept walking away with our sandwiches and bunches of bananas but otherwise it was quite pleasant and I took a couple of photos, the Himalayas which are spread out like a backcloth to the river and are usually very beautiful were hidden in mist. The day was rather spoilt by us knocking over a goat on the way back and I think breaking one of its legs, we couldn't stop as a furious crowd would have demanded vast sums of money, but I felt rather sick for the rest of the way back.*

*The rest of the week has been uneventful, I've written an article which I don't suppose anyone will publish<sup>106</sup>, knitted the back of a pullover for you, fed my broody hens, picked flowers, and fallen into bed exhausted every night! We listened to Scotland beat the Wallabies on Saturday which cheered us. I was enquiring about guitars in Dibrugargh yesterday and they can get me an Indian made one for Rs. 80 (about the same price as yours) so when I can raise that amount of money I shall buy it. They can also get strings quite easily so I don't know why you can't? This time next week we shall be just setting off on our fishing trip, Daddy says he plans to catch a thirty pounder and send you a scale as big as a plate, I'm only taking small spoons as I should be petrified if I got a monster on the end of my line. I only hope this cold wet weather will have stopped, as it is the river will probably be too muddy after all this rain. This evening our wonderful Nazira Cinemascope is presenting "3 coins in a fountain"!! As the whole idea of getting it was to have new films we are all rather fed up.*

*A very dull letter I'm afraid, I'm already beginning to feel out of touch with things at home which is rather dismal. "Wake up little Suzy" still at the top of the hit parade here!  
With love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 28th February 1958

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, I'm glad you've got the guitar strings at last, I shall probably ask for assistance when I get mine but I can't raise the funds just at the minute hope to get it before the hot weather as I can practise locked into the Air Conditioned Room? I certainly have heard of ~~Brian~~ Denis Mathews<sup>107</sup>, what a lot of barbarians there must be at your school to try to get out of listening to him!*

*We should have been off on our fishing holiday to-day, but alas it has been cancelled or rather postponed till the 9th, somebody made a muddle of the booking of the Forest bungalow we were to stay in. Perhaps it will all be for the best, the fishing gets better as it gets warmer but the trouble is that I shall be so warm myself that I shall probably be able to do nothing but sit under a bush and pant. However it is very oppressive to-day and might easily be building up for rain, so we may be lucky and get the wet week over, we always have one about this time of year.*

*We broke out on Monday and went up to Jorhat to watch a polo match (chiefly to meet the friends with whom we are going to fish I must admit). We took a friend and child with us and arrived there at three thirty, hot, tired and dusty, just as the match was starting. Our side (Assam CO) was roundly beaten, and after a couple of drinks we set off home. Its nearly three hours over pretty grisly roads, and we were just entering the last stretch to Cherideo and thinking how nice our fireside was going to look when we got a puncture. We had no torch and only an ancient spare wheel so you can imagine Daddy's language, after a lot of grunting and sweating it was changed, and Daddy said "Well if we get another now we've had it" and when we got back we found the other tyre on the same side flat. Thank heavens it had just held, but the tube was ripped to pieces so it was an expensive trip. It took the whole of the next day to recover from too.*

*My temple work hasn't yielded any results this week, its getting rather hot and standing on my head scraping at dry mud is an exhausting business and leaves me with a splitting headache. However I mean to persist if I can, its good for the liver if nothing else, if only my progress wasn't so slow, but that is one of the snags of true archaeology! We did have a find this week, at least it may be - a tube well is being sunk and a most peculiar stone was thrown up from about eighty feet. It is solid marble (or some such) and we've neither of us seen anything like it before, and to my eyes it looks as if it had been roughly shaped, and something (a handle?) has been broken off one end. In fact I'm sure it is a stone age weapon, but how to find out? I daren't entrust it to the post, the only thing is to seek out a geologist and find out if such stone does grow around here. If not we might easily be on to Something Big!*

*My first lot of baby chicks hatched on Sunday and I'm expecting another lot any day - and that's about all the news for this week. Oh yes, our croquet set is installed, the mallets are too heavy and the balls too light but I manage to beat Daddy more times than not which gives me great satisfaction. I'm now waiting for my Assamese Professor and my baby Hornbill which Daddy has promised to get for me. I stick myself in with my Assamese books for an hour after lunch but have got to a rather depressing stage when I know the rules of grammar (practically none) and have simply got to sit down and learn a whole lot of words. My Grammar book is written by an Italian Priest and printed in Gauhati all back to front so it doesn't make it any easier. Daddy is reading a book about the Burma Campaign and*



*getting terribly sentimental about the good old army days which he really loathed. Tomorrow is our wedding anniversary - 17 years. We hoped to spend it by the banks of the Manas but will have to make do with some cooking sherry by our own fire-side. We bravely light a fire each evening though it's really much too warm, but once we give up we have to admit that the hot weather has arrived which is a grim thought.*

*You seem to have been having blizzards and more blizzards and I supposed the water will be cold for some time and make the fishing season late. I think it would be a good idea to try and get a second hand motor scooter (not a motorbike, far too dangerous) but will you be able to learn to ride it, get a licence and all in the holidays? You have the 15 pounds in your savings book and eight left over from your electric trains, Stanley Barr is the bloke to get on to anyway as he knows of one bought for 11 pounds. Daddy says he will teach you to drive a car when you come out, can't believe you're old enough to do any of these dangerous things. Next morning.*

*My chicks have hatched, I always feel as proud as if I'd laid the eggs myself. [a short piece cut from a newspaper 'False Teeth as Bait' - someone who caught a pike with false teeth - stuck in] Refuse to lend you mine under any circumstances! I'm just off to do my morning digging, my auspicious day I feel sure.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*[In pencil] A wild pheasant's feather.*

Iris to Alan Thursday 6th March 1958 Cherideo

*Dear Alan,*

*Well this really is the eve of our departure on our fishing trip I think, though I expect a telegram any moment to say there has been another muddle and we can't go at all. Daddy is dashing round with little lists and saying "aren't you going to start packing?" at intervals, as I've only got to take two pairs of slacks and my pyjamas and have 24 hours in front of me I can't see the rush. The weather is set fair, in fact it's going to be terribly hot I'm afraid and I have laid in a large supply of aspirin tablets for the headaches I'm sure to get. Daddy is telling everyone he is going to throw back anything under 20 lbs, but we shall look a little foolish if we don't catch a thing which is quite likely. It is full moon at the moment which is fatal for fish as they feed at night, but it's always a good excuse.*

*We are starting off tomorrow afternoon stopping at a friend's house for dinner and a short rest, then driving on through the night and crossing the Brahmaputra at nine the next morning. The forest bungalow is about 100 miles beyond that so we shall be very tired, hot and dusty by the time we arrive, let's hope we don't get too many punctures to reduce Daddy to a state of nervous prostration. We are not taking Dinah after all as the other people in the party aren't taking their dogs, this is the one thing that is upsetting me as she pines terribly when we go away, but she and Candy are going to stay with friends who have two little dogs so she should be all right. It is going to be far more complicated packing their baskets, brushes, bowls, biccy tins, powder and food than our stuff.*

*My second lot of chicks all hatched successfully and they seem healthy so I feel I can leave them without too much worry. As Daddy rightly points out, once I have my own hornbills and adjutant storks and adjutant monkeys I shall be pinned to the bungalow forever – but it's worth it I reckon. Anyway I'm going to have to make the most of this last week's freedom.*

*Our wedding anniversary on Saturday was spent quietly. I dug at the temple all morning, I took a Mali with me and we did more in a couple of hours than I manage on my own in the week. We have unearthed the base of a pillar and found bits of broken pottery. I have begun*

*to see what the temple must have looked like, but alas all the walls have obviously been broken down and I'm not going to find much more than the floor left. I wrote to the head of the Archaeological Department in Gauhati and he has written to the Minister of Education in Shillong to see if they can't stop people breaking down the temple as fast as I unearth it — but I doubt if anything will be done about it.*

*In the evening I dressed up and ordered a special dinner for the occasion, but it was all rather a flop as first there was a hailstorm which daddy got in a panic about as it does so much damage to the new tea, and then Scotland was beaten by Ireland at rugger. Luckily the hail wasn't bad enough to do much damage, the tea bushes are beginning to furr all over with the first green leaf and "tipping" starts on Monday — the first plucking of the year.*

*Daddy has dashed off today to try and get hold of some vital bit of machinery for the factory as he can't manufacture his leaf at the moment. The other day Cherideo's tea got the best price of any other tea on the London market which was a great thrill Daddy reckoned the company made over £3000 profit out of those eighty tea chests alone, I wish they they'd give us even a tiny bit of it.*

*On Sunday Daddy went in to Nazira to play golf and I dug again, from eight in the morning to 12:30, my hand was so weak at the end I could hardly hold the trowel. I must admit I spend a certain amount of time watching the vultures who are nesting there, I think they have young but my eyes aren't good enough to see properly.*

*On Monday we went to watch the final of the first Sibsager Polo match, which is the biggest match of the year. Nazira got beaten by Jorhat again, it was very feeble polo and people kept falling off in heaps, I was much more worried about their horses than them. I must start trying to look round for a pony when I come back, I would like an old polo pony like Marleen that I could hack around the garden without too much trouble before you come. I don't think I could gallop horses now, unless I could hold it with one hand and my teeth with the other. The polo match was at Moran club and there was a terrific crowd of people, I talked till I felt ill and then had a sleepless night afterwards and took the whole of Tuesday recovering from it.*

*On Wednesday we had our very important director to lunch, he comes out for three weeks every cold weather and tells us how lucky we are to live in such a wonderful climate and being so important we can't answer back. He is madly rich, as well as very good-looking, and owns several tea gardens of his own as well as half the Assam Company, and so dull it just isn't true. He can't talk about anything except stocks and shares, luckily the general manager came to lunch so the conversation kept going, we talked about fishing most of the time, as the director doesn't fish he just had to sit and think about his money in silence.*

*It is Holi festival at the moment, the big Hindu spring festival when they squirt red water all over the place. Most of my servants are away so it's rather restful and I shall cook dinner tonight, fried eggs and bacon without a doubt. We have started using a fan at night but it's still cool indoors, cool enough without a jersey that is. Daddy is wanting rain badly but I hope it'll hold off for this next week. We are told that there are rhino in reserve forests round the forest bungalow we are going to, but I hope they are nice tame ones. There is a lot of big game of all kinds and we are going armed with cameras though if I saw a tiger I should never have the presence of mind to photograph it.*

*My next letter may be a day or two late but will be full of enormous fish-scales I hope! I've sent the money for your licences, hope Granny will send it in time.*

*Herewith Hillary on the South Col — A pity the tilted mountains give it away!*

*Much love, and tight lines!*

*Mummy*

Notebook: March 11th The Manas. Sitting on the verandah of the forest bungalow with an opal after sunset glow & the rustle of river over stones. A beautiful place, steep hills rising straight from the river, duck & curlews gliding over the water, & a wonderful sense of peace & remoteness. We have seen wild buffalo, deer, a crocodile, & the spoor of rhino.

Sunday. We drove & drove over bumpy, dusty roads, eyes strung with sleeplessness, heads aching, sweaty dust clinging to hair & neck. But the bungalow at the end of it was so beautiful, poised on the bank of the river with white flowering bushes all round that we forgot our tiredness at once & Mac went down to catch a 7 lb fish in the first 10 minutes.

Monday. Mac & Robert<sup>108</sup> & I went out all day, they caught 4 huge fish. Mac's 23 lb er a record for him. I got rather cross being left out, & came back to find May & Pam absolutely squiffy, shrieking & hiding themselves in their rooms. Felt depressed & abandoned & sat by the river bank till after dark. Robert heard a tiger roar the night before.

Tuesday. Went out on my own with Gangu, & fished the good rapid furiously, got several bits – read "The Lovers" & had lunch, & then walked up hot stones for some way, feeling tired but determined. Saw some deer & 2 Brahminy duck quacking & gossiping in the shallows & then rising in lovely symmetry, red-gold & white. On my way back I hooked a big fish, but lost him a little way from the bank – very miserable for a minute or two, but enjoyed the day & had a hysterical evening of bridge & typewriter talk.

Wednesday. Pam, May<sup>109</sup>, Charles<sup>110</sup> & I went to the same rapid again & I fished a little but my rod was very stiff. We had the elephant, a ravishing creature, gentle & fastidious, putting its huge feet down with careful precision, pushing dust from its foot to its trunk & blowing it over itself. The mahout scrubbed it all over before we left, it rolled from one side to the other like a plump lady at a masseuse, eyes closed. A deer skipped away in front of us, its white tail bobbing like a rabbit, we saw droppings of buffalo that must have been left an hour before. Mac & Robert fished the gorge & got 9 fish, so were smug & happy.

Thursday. I sat & painted the bungalow (James said "Fancy not being able to paint at your age"). We had a gossipy lunch & a rest & then Pam & I & the children took the elephant across & fished the stretch where the big fish are, without effect. Played bridge in the evening & had an early night.

Friday. We went up in the boat (plus perfumed lads with halitosis at least 50 of us) to the upper stretch & fished furiously all morning & some of the afternoon. Got two tugs in the day, but it was overcast & disappointing. Charles brought back a deer, he had seen leopard, pig & buffalo. Mac & Robert caught 4 fish in the evening, Mac lost a monster. Mr Pullen only caught one all day. As I write a forest fire is crackling all around us.

Saturday. Painted my picture – not too bad but hectic. Mac & Robert fished without success all morning & after a late lunch Pam & I went & thrashed the rapid opposite again without success, though the men stepped in & caught 2 fish almost at once. I forgot to mention we saw langur monkeys on Monday, & Mac & Robert saw an otter.

Iris to Alan, Tuesday 18th Mar 1958 Cherideo

*Dear Alan,*

*Well we are back from our holiday, we got back at ten last night after driving 350 miles over roads like cart tracks a lot of the way, choking in dust, and with the car dropping vital bits of itself at intervals and having to be peered into and tied together. But I will start from the beginning, and write it like a diary so as not to forget anything.*

*Saturday and Sunday. I wrote to you in the morning, and after lunch we packed, Daddy studying endless lists and saying "Good god we'll never get all this stuff in" and "Surely you don't want your butterfly net!" and "Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up." The dogs lay under our beds miserably, they knew we weren't going to take them and I hated leaving them behind but*

*as it turned out they wouldn't have enjoyed it much and the journey would have been even worse with hot furry bodies in the car on top of everything else.*

*We set off having got everything in easily including my butterfly net at four thirty, and arrived at a friend's house in Jorhat at six. The idea had been to have an early supper there, a few hours sleep, and then start for Gauhati with him at midnight. However when we got there we found that he hadn't started to pack and we sat around till ten thirty before having supper, and left straight after it. I was exhausted before we started and seven hours later when we had breakfast at Gauhati I felt I couldn't stand another minute. We were supposed to be changing into a jeep which was to be waiting for us there but we drove round and round for half an hour without finding it and finally had to stay in the little car we were in (a Fiat we had borrowed for the journey) which depressed us as we had heard the roads were too bad for anything but a jeep.*

*We loaded the cars onto the ferry and amused ourselves during the crossing (of the Brahmaputra) by watching the pink porpoises that were diving all around, I tried to catch them on my Cine<sup>111</sup> but as soon as I'd focussed they'd gone. We had met our other friends, the Shaws, and their two small boys, so now moved off in a convoy of three cars and a jeep and trailer. The dust was appalling and it was pretty hot and we just drove on and on for another hundred miles with aching eyes and heads.*

*The roads weren't too bad but at one place they were doing them up and had just put down some huge spiky boulders and our little car got impaled on them - we thought we should never get off and when we finally did it was with a fearful grinding noise and we had loosened some vital part underneath which Daddy worried about for the rest of the trip.*

*We stopped for lunch by the side of the road, and at about four we got to the edge of the Manas Wild Life Sanctuary. It was lovely forest all around, and there was the possibility of seeing anything, including rhino, but we couldn't in fact have seen a herd of elephants because the dust was so appalling. The road was just a rut filled with soft white earth through which we ploughed and skidded and wheezed for ten miles, it took us over an hour and Daddy was saying "We can't make it" every inch of the way. How the poor little car survived I don't know, but we all got through, and arrived at the other end looking like a lot of ghosts with blood-red holes in their white faces (our eyes). But as soon as we got out of the car we forgot the trip and our tiredness because the bungalow and the whole place was so lovely. The bungalow was perched on a side of the hill with the whole wide river below it and big, blue hills all round. Daddy and Robert Shaw took one look at the river, rushed for their rods, and without even shaking the dust out of their eyes, plunged in and started to fish. Within ten minutes Daddy had hooked a fish in the run just below, a 7 lb-er, but he was so excited that he threw it down on the end of his rod and broke it. Luckily he had a spare rod with him.*

*We went down and washed our faces and hair and feet in the river and got a fire going for a cup of tea – not us literally as we had all brought servants with us - and that tea tasted better than anything I've ever drunk, smoky and black as it was. Then we unpacked and made our beds and changed and after an early supper we fell into them, they were just wooden boards with very thin cotton mattresses on them but they felt as good as the tea tasted.*

*Monday. This is going to be a very long letter, I hope it isn't too boring but you can skip bits, I don't suppose the girls will be interested in fishing but I have to write it all in one, couldn't do it twice!*

*While we were having breakfast we saw four wild buffalo on the far side of the river. All the land round for miles is a sanctuary, and every day we saw buffalo and on several occasions deer, and on that first night Robert Shaw heard a tiger grunting just outside the bungalow. There were wild duck and fishing eagles and curlews on the water and while we were having lunch we saw some langur monkeys – look them up in your book, the big grey*

kind, very strong and savage sometimes. Anyway, Daddy, Robert Shaw, Dr Emmet<sup>112</sup> and I set off after breakfast with, and left Pam Shaw and Mrs Robertson to have a peaceful day in the bungalow.

We fished for a few minutes and then I offered Dr Emmet my rod to try casting as he hadn't got one. Alas he must have hit it on a stone or something because he broke the end ring and I couldn't use it any more that day. I borrowed a rod from Robert but it wasn't much good and I had to watch everyone else catching huge fish all round.

Robert hooked one first and landed it after about twenty minutes, a fourteen and a half pounder. Then a few minutes later we looked down and saw Daddy leaping through the water like a gazelle, how he did it over the huge slippery boulders I don't know, he ran for about a hundred yards before the fish stopped and I ran after him with my camera. It was a big one, and I wanted to get a Cine of him landing it but the camera jammed and my little pleas for help - "Darling it's stuck, what shall I do?" - were met with roars from Daddy as you can imagine.

At last it was in the shallow water and hit on the head and it weighed 23 lbs which is the biggest fish Daddy has ever caught. But I didn't get a picture of him playing it, though I took one after of him holding it up. Everyone except me was very pleased by this time, and we fished on till lunch time, and had our lunch in thick jungle, covered with red ants, and expecting to be disturbed by a wild buffalo any minute. We walked out through grass above our heads, dense and terrifying as it was just the sort of place a tiger would lie up in the heat of the day.

We came out at the most delicious looking rapid under which we could see great fins and tails moving, Robert went to one side and Daddy to the other and they got a tug at nearly every cast. After about ten misses Robert hooked one and landed it without much trouble - 22 lbs and a bit, a bigger fish than Daddy's but in poor condition. Then a minute later Daddy got another, fifteen lbs. I thought they might offer me a go but not a bite, so I sat on a sand bank and sulked, I was so jealous.

We finally made our way back to the bungalow, and I went home while they had one more bash and Daddy got another, I can't remember how much it was, oh yes, 12lbs. Altogether they got 93 lbs of fish that day so were pretty smug. When we got back to the bungalow we had tea and changed and then I went down to sit by the river bank until it was dark in the hopes that I might see something, there was a rustle in the grass behind me once and my blood froze but it was only a small, tame cat.

Tuesday. The men went upstream, so I took my lunch and sneaked back to the rapid where they had caught their fish the day before. I fished it for an hour before lunch, had several tugs but couldn't seem to hook them, I think they were just fooling about. I ate my sandwiches in the shade of some long grass, it was very hot and during lunch I saw several deer come down to drink on the opposite bank. I read and dozed for a bit and then fished on upstream, at about four I turned back and cast once more into a nice looking run and hooked a fish. It felt enormous and I had nobody with me except the little boy we had brought with us who was terrified of the water. I reeled and reeled, but my reel was jamming and it was a frightful effort to turn it at all. I got the fish to about ten feet off the bank, and then had to stop for a moment to rest and it gave a sudden lurch - and broke the line.

I don't know whether it was my fault or whether it would ever have been landed on an eight lb. breaking strain line, Daddy said afterwards I should have played it for an hour at least. Anyway I felt like bursting into tears on the spot, and also rather miserable for the fish at having to swim round with my hooks in its mouth. I didn't fish much more, having exhausted all the good water, when I got back my fish had reached enormous proportions, I didn't see it but it was the heaviest thing I've ever had on my line, ten to twelve pounds at least, perhaps more.

Daddy and Robert hadn't had a very good day, two fish each, the biggest about nine pounds I think. We played bridge in the evening and had a hilarious time, Pam Shaw and I giggle about as much as Jill and I do, terribly childish but we think ourselves very funny. We were talking the way I type, offering each other black coffee and passing the silt, in fact we did it for the rest of the week and drove everybody mad but still reduced ourselves and each other to hysterics.

Wednesday. Daddy and Robert went off again, and the rest of us took the elephant and went back to the same rapid again. The elephant was called Lai Pyari (Red Darling) and she was an absolute pet. Before we went out her mahout gave her an enormous dusting down with a rag, she lay on one side and then the other, her eyes closed, while he walked all over and round her flapping and banging, then she got up and gave herself a dust bath by scooping the dust into her trunk with one foot and then spraying it all over herself.

We took it in turns to ride her, she was so careful and never put a foot wrong, I don't know why people describe a clumsy person as being like an elephant because they are the least clumsy things in the world. When I think of the way we slipped and stumbled over boulders and down sandy banks and the delicate way she put her feet down, never tripping, always testing, as gentle and controlled as a cat, it was wonderful to watch.

We disturbed a deer in thick jungle and it leapt off with its tail bobbing like a rabbit. Alas, the minute I started to fish I realised that my reel was jamming hopelessly, and after about an hour when I got in a dozen casts I gave up, if I had hooked a fish I could never have landed it. We had a picnic and lay in the water and the children scrambled over the rocks and we ambled back in stages, there were two brahminy ducks near us, they are beautiful birds, black and white and tawny gold, and they stay together for life, if one dies the other does too. They were quacking and complaining to each other that really the trippers these days, there wasn't a quiet spot left on the river.

We got back to find the two men very pleased with themselves, they had got ten fish, five each, weights 13, 11, 8, 7½, 7½, 7, 7, 4,4, 3½ I got no sympathy for my fruitless day needless to say.

While we had been out another man had arrived at the bungalow, a Mr Pullen, quite a famous fisherman who had caught the record fish on the river, 321bs. We fitted in somehow and he turned out to be very nice and my goodness I took my hat off to him for sheer guts. He was sixty and had come out from England for the fishing, not only that but he had a tin leg, the real one having been chewed off by a tiger. He had to be helped along by two men across the stones, but he had a rubber boat and he fished from that most of the time. Imagine travelling across the world to fish at that age even without a tin leg, he was going on to the Seychelles, New Zealand and Canada!

He had been to nearly every country in the world and said that Chile was the most beautiful, the nicest people, and the best trout fishing - so I am now dedicated to finding you a job there. Of course the minute he arrived Daddy and Robert Shaw couldn't rest for a minute in case he was catching more fish than them, luckily he didn't, they hurried back every evening with anguished expressions and didn't relax until they had heard what he had got.

Thursday We women felt rather tired so spent a quiet day in and around home, in the morning I painted the bungalow, James Shaw (aged 6) came and looked at my picture soon after I had started and said: "Well, fancy not being able to paint at your age" which was a bit shattering, actually it didn't turn out too bad in the end, Daddy likes it anyway. We also took some snaps of Lai Pyari giving herself a dust bath, she wouldn't play for a long time, just stood with her legs crossed, flapping her eyelashes like a temperamental film star. Pam and I took her and the children out in the evening and fished a bit but my reel was still jamming



badly. The men had a disappointing day (for them) Daddy got four fish trolling (11, 7, 6, 3lbs) which wasn't too bad, Robert only two small ones.

Friday. We all went upstream together, we started off by boat with at least twenty of us, rods and picnic baskets weighing it down until it was only just above water, all sorts of hangers on appeared out of nowhere at the last moment and leapt aboard, we really wondered why they didn't bring the elephant. Daddy had mended my reel and Pam and I fished seriously all morning in the most delectable looking water but not a bite, the men didn't get one either which was one comfort.

We walked back in the afternoon and fished the rapid opposite the bungalow and I got one good tug, then Pam and I gave up and no sooner were we sitting on the verandah when Robert and Mac started pulling fish out, Robert three, Daddy two, the biggest 5½ lbs but I wouldn't have said no to any of them.

Mr Pullen came back with only one fish which was a great relief, he used to float downstream for ten miles and then his rubber boat was put on a car and they came back by road. He saw a lot of wild life and nearly ran over a wild buffalo in his boat, he saw two crocodiles and otters, the crocodiles didn't appeal to me much but apparently there are only two on the river and they keep strictly to fish.

Dr Emmet came back from a shooting trip he had been on with a barking deer he had shot, we ate it but I loathe the idea of shooting deer. He had seen a leopard, wild pig and buffalo. Of course he had gone beyond the sanctuary.

Saturday. Another peaceful morning of painting and packing. Daddy and Robert took the elephant but came back without a fish. In the afternoon Pam and I set off determined to hook something in the rapid, we cast madly into every inch of the water without success, but the men hadn't arrived more than a few minutes before Daddy got a nine pounder. Really it was too galling. I can only think that our spoons were too small, they were using much bigger ones. They caught two more small fish and that was that - so the end of the story is that I caught nothing and they caught 268lbs of mahseer, Daddy 19 fish, weighing 161lbs - average 8 lbs. Robert Shaw 15 fish, 107lbs, average 7½ lbs. life. [Rest of letter is missing.]

Iris to her children, Cherideo, 22nd March 1958

*Darlings,*

Thank you for all your letters, Daddy certainly appreciated the extracts you sent, Alan, he took it in to the club and read them out to his sporty friends (all Scotsmen of course). I hope the boxing final wasn't too devastating and that you won though I hate the idea of people hitting your sensitive ears. We envy you all the sport you will be seeing on T.V. all of you, Boat Race etc. To-day is the Grand National and we hope to hear it though we are going out to dinner. I hope Granny backed My Babur in the Lincolnshire, it was my choice being the only Indian-sounding horse.

Here it is hot and dry, no rain for a month and the tension is mounting as Daddy's precious tea begins to look poorly or so he imagines, it looks beautifully green and healthy to me. My garden is cracked and brown and the leaves of the shrubs curling at the edges, it's so enormous that the malis can only water bits of it at a time. The cows are thin, the hens going round with their mouths open, and our tempers frayed. We have got to the stage where we don't mention the word "rain", we just scan the sky for clouds until our eyes ache, and listen to the wireless for crackles that might be thunder, and watch the curtains for a breeze that might mean a storm is coming.

I am reading "The Glorious Koran", the Mahommedans Bible, and I can understand why they describe hell as a desert with only boiling water to drink, though to you that probably

*sounds quite a nice idea after your wet winter. Of course the rain will come one of these nights and then it'll pour for days and days and the tea bushes will get fungus, and my baby chicks will get chills and we shall still be moaning!*

*Both Daddy and I had an eventful morning yesterday, his more so than mine as he shot a leopard. I hasten to add that he hated doing it, and felt sick most of the rest of the day, at first he said I wasn't to tell you, but now he says I can as long as you understand the circumstances and that it is the last animal he ever shoots. He was set upon by a whole crowd of agitated coolies saying that there was an enormous tiger in the jungle which prevented them from going to work and which was doing a lot of damage in their village. Daddy said he hadn't any ammunition suitable for a tiger, but they wouldn't hear of it and more or less forced him onto an elephant. It was a tiny little beast, four years old, and his legs were well within reach of any tiger so he felt most insecure, especially as his only two bullets would have merely been like pin pricks to it.*

*However when he saw the "tiger" it was in fact a small leopard. He shouted and made as much noise as he could but the wretched animal didn't move, just flicked its tail and let them come up to within fifteen feet of it. There was nothing for it but to shoot it, and the only consolation he has is that it must have been ill to behave so strangely. The coolies were delighted and the skin is now in a tin in the go-down, we shall rough cure it as a memento of Daddy's last exploit as a big game hunter. Its strange how anyone can get pleasure out of killing, and yet he used to and lots of people still do. Must be a sign of growing old.*

*While all this was going on I was in Sibsager with both cameras, taking some photos of the temples and buying a pair of shoes for Daddy. I also went to see an Assamese friend of mine, and he took me round one of the little temples I hadn't seen, or rather showed me the carvings on the outside. There wasn't much left but what there was was lovely, the brick carved into patterns and figures most beautifully. I went back to have tea in his house, always rather an embarrassing business in Assam as they think it rude to watch a guest eat and drink so the tray was dumped in front of me and I was left staring into space.*

*Mr Handique is Principal of the Sibsager Technical Institute and lives in a house just one degree better than a coolie house. He has seven children all milling round, and a wooden box on the floor full of bits of carvings he has found at various times, some of them very old. He gave me an old coin and a cannon ball and a rather hideous modern copy of one of the temples (the elephant house where we had several picnics, do you remember?) and some cloth, and a book and five eggs to set. It was most embarrassing as he had so little and kept producing more and more little parcels which I couldn't refuse. I told him that I wasn't going to do any more digging because of the students who broke it down and he said "I will immediately erect one signpost at that place". As if a sign post would make the slightest difference! Anyway I wrote a very rude letter to the local paper about it so perhaps something will happen.*

*In his drawing room (one table and a lot of paper flowers) he had a huge framed picture of Jesus, Gautama the Buddha and Gandhi whom he thought were the three greatest people who had ever lived - he is a Hindu of course. Anyway I thought it was a nice thought. I tried out a few Assamese phrases on his wife and she appeared to understand them, but if they answer back I'm sunk.*

*The rest of the week has been as usual, except that we went to the club on Monday to see the film, can't remember what it was called but it had some wonderful pictures of buffalo in it. Also a spine-chilling bit at the end where the bad man, who is waiting outside the cave to kill the good man, is frozen stiff, still sitting up and pointing his gun, most gruesome even to the lumps of snow on his eyelashes. They do get the most peculiar films I must say and the Cinemascope is quite wasted. On Sunday our Indian assistant lent me his cook to make a curry, he brought up all sorts of spices in envelopes and cooked a vast meal, we were bent*

*double with indigestion for the rest of the day. My cook has one curry which he produces every time and I thought it might have taught him something, but I fear he is too old to learn. We're going out to dinner with an Indian this evening who produces curries that burn huge holes in your stomach, I don't know how I shall manage to avoid eating it.*

*Daddy has just taken me to see the two little elephants who are clearing a bit of jungle for him. They are both four years old and terribly sweet, like a couple of naughty schoolboys, forever slinking off to get something to eat when they should be working. I wish I could have an elephant but the problem of feeding it would be enormous. I've just read Elephant Bill's latest book, "The Spotted Deer" which you would like.*

*I enclose some snaps, they are very disappointing and I think it may be something to do with the printing so I'm sending 4 negatives, will you take them to Sandersons and ask him to print them semi-matt and see if they are better? And send them back when they are done. The dogs are well, Bola is a pet and Daddy loves him which makes the other two madly jealous. I wonder if Juno's wedding has been arranged and how she enjoyed her stay in kennels. Can't imagine her "roughing" it with no Aga or Granpa's bed and silk eiderdown!*

*I hope Alan's jaunt down a coal mine is a success, shall look forward to hearing about it in detail. In fact expect to get lots of letters in the holidays, if the money holds out!*

*Our love to Granny & Granpa & lots to you,  
Mummy*

On the reference to the shooting of a small leopard by my father, the event had several repercussions. For me, it meant at some point an extra set of teeth (possibly the small ones alongside various tusks and teeth in the following photograph) with which I impressed my friends.



For my mother, it seems to have been a very upsetting event and she wrote an account of the it, after my father had died in 1977, as part of a short story for the radio. Although somewhat altered, the strong feelings, resemble a similar situation depicted in George Orwell's story *Shooting an Elephant*.

She did write an essay at after the Manas trip that she may have hoped to publish.

### *April 1958*

April - an enchanted word, a dewy, lamb-like word, a word that smells of bluebell woods and chocolate and wet grass. April with her.... 'proud-pied April', April laughing her girlish laughter - but not here. Here April is sticky creases in the elbows and under the chin: hot water in the cold tap: boiled cucumber as a vegetable; ice melting in the fridge and lying in pink puddles round the dogs meat. April is eye-flies and creaky fans and leeches.

To be fair April is also orchids and fountains of bougainvillea, pink and purple and salmon, and delicious drifting balls of white cotton from the simul trees. It is the opening of the plucking season, too, with the women moving like swans through the green lakes of tea. It is the flowering time for the Japanese hibiscus, which has big rose like blooms that start the day white and end it deep pink. It is the month we move into our Air Conditioned room, a dressing room in which we put our beds and my typewriter, and in which I sit through the long hot afternoons, staring out like a fish in an aquarium at the blazing world outside. It is the month the parrots start flying down from the hills. It is the month (oh irony, oh aching nostalgia) we hear the cuckoo.

A new routine has to be evolved to face the weather with, and to ensure that one does not sit about, nerveless and mouldering, through the six months that it lasts. A six o'clock start to the day is essential (though some of my friends tell me that they lie in bed longer in order to use up the long, boring hours). But from six to eight is the only time of day when it is cool enough to garden or walk with any pleasure, and there is a glistening freshness about the grass and shrubs that is unrepeatable.

At eight we breakfast, sweating slightly as we drink our coffee, and then there is the macabre performance known as Seeing the Cook. My cook is very old and very much addicted to opium. The woollen balaclava he wore through the winter has now been replaced by a strip of red cloth with which he wipes the sweat from his eyes, and uses for other purposes which I try not to contemplate. We stare into the fridge each morning, trying to seek inspiration from the lump of meat lying in its pale pink liquid, the saucers of cold beetroot and brown onions congealing in grey sauce. The fresh vegetables in our garden are finished. The meat is goat. Our hens are panting under bushes and not even thinking of laying, so we buy tiny little eggs from the bazaar at enormous cost, and I once emptied three ready-to-hatch chicks into the mayonnaise sauce I was making. I think of the advertisements for Frigidaire's in which every inch of the machine is filled with glistening puddings covered with tight white whorls of cream. I ask the cook for ideas. He wipes his forehead, clears his throat noisily, cracks his knuckles and throws out "Brown y stew and dumplings" as a suggestion. With steam pudding to follow, I suggest ironically, and he nods enthusiastically. My hair sticks to the back of my neck and I order Y Squash eggs tartly while the cook very slowly picks out some eggs and three sodden sausages and the ice drips and the pink puddles spread. I smile, without mirth, as I remember the voices of women I met in England who so envied me my life of ease and luxury in the tropics. Servants, my dear, what bliss, and all that lovely warm sunshine. They can have the whole of lovely, warm April in Assam, in exchange for one day of soft grey English rain, the glitter and slide of our Lake District streams, the beautiful, restful clouds. But this, as Browning knew and every exile before and after has discovered, is the month for home-sickness. There is nothing for it but to accept the pain, and then set it aside and concentrate on something else.

My anodyne at the moment is Assamese, the mastery of. Assam, though only a state, and rather an insignificant state, of the Indian Commonwealth, is also a country the size of

England, with its own language and history and customs. It is a backward, undeveloped, easy-going land, lying like a voluptuous woman along the Brahmaputra river, sleepy, sensuous and kind. For thousands of years it has been the melting pot for wandering people from China and Burma and Tibet, from South and West, Tais and Bodos and Aryans and Dravidians, they streamed in and settled in the fertile valley, mixing their blood and beliefs in lazy tolerance. Predominantly the Assamese are Mongolian in feature, with the old gold skins and down-folded eyes that I think the most attractive in the world. Their language is derived from Sanskrit and has very few rules, but the pronunciation is fearful. I have been struggling with it, off and on, for the last two years, but somewhat abortively as the only book I have found to teach it to English is written by an Italian priest and printed locally with all the chapters mixed and half the pages upside down. With the help of an enormous dictionary I have now got to the stage where I can translate a few pages of a childrens history book in an hour. I could proceed faster if the dictionary wasn't so fascinating in a gruesome way. There are whole pages of imitative words to express the low rumbling of the stomach. There are words for the sound of mud crackling beneath bare toes and the sound of hot oil being poured onto water. Whatever I look up, I am inevitably faced with the word for the watery matter evacuated by silkworms or drugs given to women in childbirth. There is one wonderful word for "the act of placing oneself with the face downwards on top of a bamboo and turning it for the delectation of spectators". In fact there is a word for everything, and I know depressingly few of them. However this week a teacher arrived, a very young scholar who belched nervously every time I asked him a question, and whose knees knocked together so hard that we found difficulty in keeping the books still on the table. His English was almost as hard to understand as his Assamese. I pointed to a word and asked him the meaning. Keethankeen he said firmly. Yes, but the English meaning. Keethankeen. Yes, I understood how to say it in Assamese, but what was the English word? He looked very hurt and said Keethankeen again, belching and knocking his knees together like castanets in an agony of embarrassment. Then it suddenly struck me, he was saying kith and kin, relations. The Assamese adore idioms and use them on every occasion. As one head clerk remarked bitterly to his manager: "You English think we know damn little, actually we know damn all". However, it is easy to laugh at their mistakes from the superiority of our complete ignorance. The only Assamese idiom I know is serelee-berelee, which means scattered about. A delightful expression. Serelee berelee. Almost a song.

Iris to Alan, Sunday 20th Apr 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I've got in a bit of muddle this week, and left it too late on Saturday to write three separate letters so I hope you don't mind one of these [air letter form - typed]. I think you will be back at school by now, refreshed I hope, and ready for a term of hard work and hard fishing! I wonder if you managed to get a motor bike, I agree that it would make a vast difference to be able to be free of buses and you really must try and have one for the summer. You have £8 left from your guitar money and we will advance you something on your birthday, if you can't get a second hand one could you get a new one on the never never? We could pay the instalments and you could pay us back at some later date when you have some money. The other alternative is to try and get a job for the first couple of weeks of the holidays, on a farm or a trawler or something, and put by some cash that way. I expect someone at school could put you onto something.*

*We're having a lovely cool spell with rain every day, long may it last. We've just been away for the week-end, to stay with the Rosses and listen to the Scotland v. England Soccer match, needless to say the household was sunk in gloom at the result, poor Scotland, they just*

*don't seem to be having a lucky run. I spent most of the week-end reading a huge pile of Daily Mirrors in bed!*

*While we were away there was a small Naga raid here, only about six shots fired and most of the coolies slept through it, but it is disappointing to think the trouble is starting up again as it means we can't go into the hills or up the river. We have just had a letter confirming that we can have the Forest Bungalow on the Manas river from the 9th to the 14th January next year, we were determined not to leave it too late! So I hope you'll have a chance to catch a record mahseer.*

*There seems even less news than usual this week, my days are divided between typing my T.V. play (my unwanted thriller which I'm trying to condense, not very successfully) and learning Assamese. I don't seem to get on very fast with either as there are constant interruptions, due to my bad organisation Daddy says and he's probably right. I had a new lot of chicks out yesterday, only four out of five and they are a scraggy looking bunch. We had an awful fright with Bola, our dachshund guest, the other day, last Monday We went for a long walk along a path into the Naga hills, and when the path petered out we were turning to go back when we discovered he wasn't with us. We called and shrieked, and finally Daddy had to go plunging into impenetrable jungle to try and find him. After half an hour I pictured them both lost and tottering in small circles with tongues blackened from thirst – when Bola suddenly appeared. He had obviously gone after some monkeys and got lost and then Daddy's voice had penetrated and he had found his way back. By the time Daddy arrived we were all in a state of nervous prostration and heat exhaustion. The Rosses had a six week old puppy, a very thin and wormy specimen but terribly sweet, it makes me feel I can never let Dinah have puppies as I simply couldn't bear to let them go.*

*Oh dear, someone seems to have come, it's the most extraordinary country, one no sooner settles down to something when one is interrupted. Well, he has gone, it was some elderly gent who is out to advise on how to make tea, Daddy doesn't take kindly to being told how to run his factory but he was quite a nice old man. This evening we are having a special celebration as its the Queens birthday, we are all going to stand round drinking her toasts and I only hope I don't get giggles followed by hiccoughs as I usually do on these occasions.*

*I'm going to write to Mr Marriot<sup>113</sup> shortly about letting you off a bit early at the end of next term,<sup>114</sup> I hope he'll agree, and that it won't interfere with Rugger or anything, you're not likely to be playing for the First I gather? What happened in the final of the boxing by the way? And how is the guitar getting on, or have you lost the urge? The top tune here is "I'm Available" which I don't suppose you've heard of, I haven't heard any of yours.*

*We liked the Easter letter very much most tasteful though I gather Easter wasn't a bit like that!*

*With much love from us both, Mummy*

Notebook: April 26th

I'm sitting in my A.C. room, like a fish in an aquarium, cool & quiet as I stare out at the sweating malis pushing lawn mowers outside. 93 degrees to-day, but clouds are massing & soon the unbearable climax will be reached & the rain will come. Yesterday 2 of my articles were returned – one from the Sunday Statesman with "Mr Sarkar, please do the needful" written on it – further could one sink? I was hurt & disappointed but not as much as usual – a sort of fatalism is at work – an inner core of calm that I'm trying to establish. A sort of Buddhist disassociation, a refusal to be hurt – and the feeling is also growing in my mind that my slight natural flair for writing is not, after all, a real talent. If it were I would be full of things to write about, stories would present themselves to me at every turn As it is I am constantly at a loss for plot. I shall persevere with my play, but if that fails my writing career will be over. Strange what a vast delusion it has been.



Iris to Alan, Monday 28th Apr 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, the last from home I think. It certainly sounded as if it was going to be chaotic having your friend arrive to stay the same day the girls left, but perhaps Granny copes with these things more efficiently than me! I hope it was a success anyway. I'm sorry about the motor bike, anyway if Granpa keeps his eyes open you should be able to get one before next hols. Fiona wrote most enthusiastically about the Boddingtons,<sup>115</sup> I don't know why we had such a peculiar idea about them, and thought of the old man as an ogre, he isn't particularly old either, is he? I gather you didn't see any thing of Stephen,<sup>116</sup> if you get your M.B. and a small tent you might make some jaunts with him in the summer, if he can be persuaded to get one too. And I was reading in some magazine that Braithie Hall runs courses in Dinghy sailing, this might be an idea for the summer, you might enquire from Doogan.<sup>117</sup>*

*We are in the usual state of gasping for rain, just as one crisis resolves another seems to be on us. the fact is this place needs rain every few days and we haven't had any for nearly a week. Its been the hottest week yet with the temperature up to 93 degrees and very humid, we've moved into our Air Conditioned room, I sit in it from lunch till tea, feeling like a fish in an aquarium as I stare out at the blazing sun and sweating gardeners from my cool seclusion. Coming out is an awful effort, like stepping into a hot bath, but I drag myself out for a walk with the dogs, pouring with sweat at every step. Awful to think we've got six months of this ahead of us, but the time flies with every day the same.*

*My Assamese teacher arrived at last on Wednesday, a very nervous young man, a teacher at one of our schools. He hasn't any idea of how to teach me, but we read bits out of my books and then he tells me a folk story in Assamese so that I can try and get hold of the pronunciation. The language is spoken very fast and all on one note so it's almost impossible to sort out the separate words. At the moment I feel I'll never grasp it. His English is almost as hard to understand as his Assamese so you can imagine we come to some dreadful full-stops.*

*On Monday we had our celebration at the club in honour of the Queen's birthday, not wildly thrilling as it was so hot. The film "Simon and Laura" was quite good, about a television couple who have to be the perfect husband and wife on the screen though they fight like mad off it. A relief from the grisly films we've been having. There was a dance afterwards, but a noticeable lack of enthusiasm except from the keenest types, and we didn't stay long. Really the club is terribly boring, the men talk shop and the women moan about their servants and the heat and thats that.*

*Yesterday, Sunday, we spent at home doing absolutely nothing. We took the dogs for a walk immediately after breakfast, but by ten it was too hot to be out so we just read for the rest of the day. I had been lent the most amazing book "The Third Eye", the autobiography of a Tibetan Lama. You should try to read it, its quite extraordinary. If only one knew if it was really authentic, though I can't believe anyone could make up all the things he writes about. He flies in kites, and sees Yetis and looks into the future and sees an embalmed figure of himself in a previous incarnation – among other things.*

*It's the second amazing book I've read this week, the other was "The Small Woman" about a parlour maid who suddenly decided to be a missionary in China and saved her pay every week until she had enough for the train journey, and then set off. She had the most incredible adventures, both getting there and afterwards, and is still alive and back in England after twenty years in China. It all makes me feel very feeble and dull.*

*The garden is the most extraordinary sight, as the wind has blown the cotton fluff off the trees and the lawn is just a mass of white cotton wool, and bits of it are hanging in the trees*

*like Christmas decorations. There is a cool breeze to-day and quite a few clouds so perhaps....*

*I wish I could make my letters more interesting but there just doesn't seem to be anything to say. The dogs are well, ditto hens, ditto us. Our Cine film has come back and looks good, though we haven't been able to run it through. Did the one I took before I left come out at all? I fear not by the silence. I'm looking forward to hearing about Wastwater and the fishing, if any.*

*Much love from us both. Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Saturday 2nd May 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm starting this a day early as I have people coming to stay to-morrow and shall be making puddings and beds all morning. In the afternoon I've got to make a speech at some meeting in memory of Pyoli Phukan who was a mutiny hero, they wrote to me two days ago and said they were glad to inform me that I was the appointed speaker - never asked if I wanted to be appointed. What they think I'm going to speak about I can't imagine. Pyoli Phukan's whole life was aimed at getting rid of the British and he was finally hanged by us as a punishment so it is all very awkward. Having made my speech I have then got to rush into Nazira to meet the Merediths who are coming to stay – so it'll be quite a day.*

*It was quite a night too, as we had a small cyclone at seven o'clock last evening and the chaos this morning is quite fearful. Daddy and I were standing on the verandah thinking how lovely and cool the breeze was when quite suddenly it turned into a small hurricane, thunder, lightning, screaming wind, rain lashing, trees cracking like matchwood, lights going off, pandemonium. All I could think of were my baby chicks, the guinea pigs and my lilies on the verandah, Daddy was flapping madly about the coolies houses but we couldn't do a thing about anything while it lasted as it was far too wild to go out and huge trees were falling all over the place. It only lasted five minutes but the damage done in that time was awful. Two large and lovely trees were blown down in the garden, one onto the corner of the bungalow, taking the electric light wires and the water pipes with it so we had no light or water and still haven't this morning.*

*My first thought was for my chicks as one lot were in a wire cage and very exposed, the poor darlings were crouching in a corner, absolutely soaked, so I got them out and threw them into the cow house, then rescued the guinea pigs who normally sleep outside under a tin roof but who were also thoroughly wet. Then of course we found we only had two tiny candles, the bungalow was awash and we were tripping over branches and broken glass and I was sure there were snakes crawling all over the place.*

*Daddy's only thought was for the coolies so he dashed off in the Land Rover and found the drive blocked, however it was only branches and he managed to clear them. Luckily it wasn't absolutely pitch dark when it started so the coolies had run out and nobody was hurt, amazing really as tin rooves were lifted right off houses and hurled about and a lot of the houses had just collapsed. The police outpost which is on top of a hill was completely flattened so it only needed a Naga raid to complete the confusion.*

*While the bearer and I were paddling about trying to find candles he got a message to say that his house had fallen down so off he went, and I gave up the unequal struggle, collected the dogs, a candle and a glass of sherry and read a detective story. Eventually Daddy returned with dismal stories of chaos and miserable families without rooves or dry clothes, however he had got them sorted out and there wasn't much we could do except go to bed without fans or lights, Daddy saying he would never sleep a wink and promptly falling into a deep sleep and snoring loudly all night.*

*This morning he was able to assess the damage better, the wind had gone through in a path, so half the garden was untouched, but everything it had hit it had flattened, including a lot of precious shade trees over the tea which take years to grow. My compound is just a tangle of broken branches and a lot of peaches and passion fruit have been knocked down, but there really isn't all that much damage considering, Daddy says it's a judgment on him for being so cocky about his tea and the high prices he's getting. He's been tramping round all morning without socks on as a penance and rubbed his feet raw which doesn't seem very helpful one way or the other!*

*A casualty of the storm was a little tree-rat - those grey squirrel-like animals - which was picked up dazed and frozen this morning. I warmed it in my hands and then gave it some warm milk on cotton wool, it sucked a little and I put it in a box in the kitchen. I doubt if it will live poor wee thing, but I've got a dropper and shall do my best. I believe they make wonderful pets, but the trouble is that the dogs would chase it, so I shall have to let it go if it recovers. The sun is just coming out which shows up the mess even more, but at least the wretched coolies can get their clothes dry. What a picnic.*

*It's been a nice cool week, the rain came on Monday and since then it's been very pleasant (a mere 86°). My schoolmaster came on Wednesday and I decided to launch out and tell him a story this time. I chose Cinderella and got on quite well until it got to the fairy godmother, "Suddenly" I said, "a lady like a fairy stood in front of her" He was most impressed and I asked him if he understood. Oh yes, he understood, one gentlewoman floated quickly up towards her. I was overcome and couldn't go on, so I shall have to finish it today. I wonder if I'll ever learn.*

*Yesterday I didn't feel at all well, something we had eaten I think as Daddy was a bit squeemish too. Luckily by the time the storm broke I was feeling better and seem to have quite recovered this morning. I'm not really looking forward to these people coming, I find it too hot these days so have to sit about talking to people the whole time and they're staying over till Monday to see the film "7 Brides for 7 Brothers" – for the third time but I shall enjoy it just as much. Next week-end we are supposed to be going to stay with the Edyes but there again, I hate leaving the dogs etc. and am in a state of nerves till I get back to find if they're all right. Don't know why I keep animals. I must go and try and give the tree-rat some milk, will finish this later.*

*This is the next morning and the Rat is still alive, it has already learnt to suck from its dropper and holds it between its tiny paws – rather sweet, but fatal to get fond of it as it's sure to get eaten by the cat, or something. I've now got to go and write my speech, ghastly thought, Daddy is most unsympathetic & laughing like mad at my predicament.*

*Sorry for squashed letter – hope all is well at school, Much love – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Monday 12th May 1958 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, we haven't had one from school yet but expect it to-day. I hope you enjoyed your stay with Campbell and saw "King's Rhapsody" (was it) I feel terribly out of touch with everything at home now, we might be on the moon for all the papers out here tell us, and we wait gasping for the Listeners<sup>118</sup> that Granpa sends, even though they are several weeks old. Since the cyclone I wrote about last week it has rained almost without stopping and is still beautifully cool, though I feel we shall have floods very soon, but who cares? The longer the hot weather is delayed the better as far as I'm concerned.*

*I have been in bed this last week with gastric flu (I think) anyway violent sickness and a very battered feeling afterwards. I'm all right again now, we've just been away for a week-end with the Edyes and are delighted to be back, the only charm of going away is the*

discovery of how much nicer and more comfortable ones own house is. I couldn't sleep a wink on their hard beds in their hot room and got ghastly indigestion from eating their food.

I told you in my last letter I had to make a speech at a big public meeting - it was even worse than I thought it was going to be, there were hundreds of people there and I was stood up in front of a microphone and my mind went blank, I thought I was going to be sick there and then. I somehow got through, leaving out large chunks of my speech, and sat down in a muck sweat, silly really as nobody understood a word I said! The president of the meeting got up and interpreted the speech afterwards, making it three times as long as the original so it must have been well embroidered, I was too dazed with relief to listen. He then embarked on one of his own and spoke for an hour and a half without drawing breath or looking at his notes, I was lost in admiration. I understood bits, so must be making some progress with my Assamese.

That was on Saturday, quite a day as Daddy brought in a little holuk<sup>119</sup> monkey after lunch, the Nagas had brought it down tied to a piece of bamboo and the poor little thing was exhausted and ravenously hungry. I had to feed it and the baby squirrel, dash off to make my speech, and then on into Nazira to meet my guests for the week-end. It poured with rain the whole time they were with us so we couldn't do anything but sit about (oh for the Telly) feeding the livestock at two hourly intervals. The squirrel thrived for five days and then suddenly packed up and died, I think I must have overfed it, I was very sad.

The monkey (we call him Poo for want of a better name) is still in good shape, he is pale grey with a black face, huge black eyes, long pointed fingers and no tail of course, being a gibbon. He can sit up but not walk, we don't know how old he is, a few months I should think, he's about the size of one of Daddy's hands. I feed him milk and sugar out of a spoon, I tried him with banana but he picked the pieces out of his mouth and rubbed them carefully off his fingers onto the back of a chair! Of course, I waste hours over him, but they really are enchanting creatures and after the first few months, when they learn to walk and climb trees, are no trouble at all. Even now he sleeps a lot of the time, gives a pathetic little squeak of protest when I put him back in his box and then curls up and doesn't utter again.

We've heard that Daddy is to go into Nazira and act as General Manager for three months when the present G.M. is on leave. The advantages - a swimming pool, two air-conditioned rooms and a bit more pay. The drawbacks - a steady stream of visitors, most of them boring, and living in Nazira which is hot and shut in compared to this lovely wild place. Anyway it is a boost for Daddy as he has gone over the heads of several people, but that in itself causes unpleasantness. We are moving at the end of June but it is terribly hush hush and we aren't allowed to breathe a word, you'd think the fate of nations was at stake!

We went out to dinner the other day and met some people called Burnet<sup>120</sup>, and found he was an old Sedberghian, in Sedgwick he came just after Richard and before Robert, is a mad keen fisherman and has been up the Manas for the last four years and caught a twenty-eight pounder which rather silenced Daddy. They talked fishing all evening while our host sat between them in a daze of boredom.

The Edyes showed us their colour slides when we were up there but we didn't think them as good as ours in spite of much posher equipment. Alas our last lot seem to have disappeared into space, we sent them over a month ago and haven't heard a word since. This is an impossible country in some ways. We picked a huge basketful of mushrooms when we were at the Edyes and I've just collected a pile from the tennis lawn, I've always been a bit scared of eating them out here, I don't know why, but the Edyes gave them to us at every meal and we seem to be none the worse.

Feeding time for monkeys, dogs and selves!

Much love from us both - Mummy

Iris wrote another essay on the theme of a month:

### *May 1958*

The merry merry month of May, the merry merry cyclones, the merry merry mosquitoes. The month of mushrooms and moonflowers, the month when the grass by the sides of the roads is thick with pointed seeds that stick to the hem of your skirt and prick your legs as you walk: the month when the cassias and laburnums are flowering, the gold and pink mohur trees a dream of beauty suddenly after a winter of dry leafless branches: the month of the second flush, when pale green leaf is breaking out like sweat all over the tea bushes and Mike comes back from the factory with a tongue brown from tasting the first of the seasons liquors.

This month the month of Poo, our new little ape, a white browed gibbon to give him his official name. Locally he is known as a hooluk money, but having no tail and walking upright he is of course an ape. We have had two hooluks before, Benjy-poo and Vicky-poo, so rather feebly plumped for plain Poo this time. Hooluks come from the Naga hills, and also I imagine from the Cochin and Shan hills, though I think I am right in saying their distribution is limited to this mountain range only. They are enchanting pets, with soft ears like ebony shells. Poo came to us pale grey and light as thistledown, three weeks ago. Already he is darkening (I say he, but in fact his sex is not determined until he is five years old) and when his hair is ruffled the wrong way he looks black. He will turn deep chocolate brown, with only the white band on his forehead, the black face and hands, professors hands with fingers that probe and dissect, infinitely gentle and ruthless. He will become a part of our lives as Vicky and Benjy did - already my day is weaving itself around him - his imperious beckonings for the spoonfuls of milk and sugar, his angry screams as he is put to bed, his squeaks of pleasure as he climbs out of his box with straw in his hair - these have become part of my life and could not be relinquished without pain. How foolish, we say to ourselves, to start all that again, that looking forward to seeing, that dismay at leaving, that awful stabbing sorrow at burying. But there Poo is, and there am I, his hot little body clamped to my side, his fingers digging into my shoulders, permanently smelling of straw and old bananas. I sit for hours in the grass as he plays in tiny trees, swinging and swooping with professional ease on arms ten inches long. If I move away he screams and throws himself to the ground, crawling towards me, his mouth turned down like a child's. So there is nothing for it but to stay here, picking ants and leeches off my legs until he has stuffed himself with leaves and mud and is ready for bed again. The dogs find him amusing for short periods, they lick him all over and our labrador carries sticks over and holds them in front of him in an auntyish effort to amuse him. He puts out an arm and dabs vaguely at them as they pass. He drinks milk and Adexolin<sup>121</sup> from a spoon (hooluks are prone to pneumonia) and eats banana and apple, carefully removing pips and pith with those meticulous fingers, squinting at them and dropping them onto my lap. He has three noises, squeaks of pleasure or desire, screams of rage and fear, and a noise somewhere between a belch and a yawn that denotes surprise and interest in a new experience. Very little is known about hooluks and I feel I should keep a scientific log book of his progress. That they are intelligent animals is unquestionable. Poo, who is probably six months old, learnt to drink with a spoon in one lesson, and will learn as quickly to feed himself from a saucer when he is a little stronger. Vicky at two years old would open the lid of her box, climb in an old sweater of Mikes, and close the box on top of herself for the night and reverse the process in the morning. Her favourite sport was being dragged round the polished verandah on her tummy, clinging to the dachshunds tail like a water skier. It occurs to me that I might make more scientific tests on Poo, to see, for

instance, he compares with a chimp for intelligence. If I can be scientific about him. I fear this letter will deteriorate into a documentary on Poo's Progress.

May is the month of marriages, when the servants all ask for leave to arrange husbands for their daughters and drums beat hilariously through the night. The labourers on a tea garden are recruited from Dravidian tribes, Oraons, Santhals, Koyahs and many others, persuaded from their central Indian countries, and usually content to stay where work is available, and often a little land. They are gay, childlike, loyal and lazy in exactly the same proportions as people of any other country, but being born into a system that protects them from birth to death, that finds them husbands at a suitable age, provides an easy, elastic moral code, copes kindly and efficiently with widowhood and old age, they are on the whole happier than us, their fortunate forward counterparts. I always want to smile when I hear people talk of "backward" and "under-developed" countries - wondering if they know what makes for "development". Certainly not roads, or houses or Christianity. A small fixed wage, some Paludrine<sup>122</sup> pills, a little opium perhaps or at any rate "lal pani" red water, and his temple - what more could a man want, who is not bedevilled by fears of Cancer and whether his daughter in law will care for him when he is old. Under-developed countries have a lot to be said for them. There are no neurotics, juvenile delinquents and broken homes among backward peoples.

All of which has led me a long way from tea garden weddings.

May is the month of the mason wasp, a solitary wasp that rolls little balls of damp clay into balls and flies with them to a suitable spot, where it moulds them into rows of rooms in which, with buzzing concentration, it (or she I suppose, I know nothing of the male mason wasp, though there must be one) lays an egg. In with the egg a dozen or so anaesthetised spiders and caterpillars are stuffed and then the house is sealed off and the wasp flies off - to rest, or build another bungalow? I don't know, because by this time I am exhausted and can follow her no further. And in spite of my admiration for her skill, am soon exasperated to find every key-hole full of clay and caterpillars, and my typewriter jammed with mud and grubs, and cotton reels and my sewing machine and my books and my photograph album.

May is the month of moths, who come in to sit on our walls at night until they are inlaid with gold like Solomon's temple. Apart from the fabulous Atlas and Moon Moths, there are myriads of tiny types, lacquered in silver and gold, enamelled in green and bronze and turquoise, each perfectly patterned body a miracle of beauty - and one crunching mouthful for the lizards that lurk behind the picture frames. Butterflies are about too, I used to collect them but now cannot bring myself to kill them only to see their bodies mouldering behind glass, the climate makes it almost impossible to preserve them. A pity, as this is a paradise for the butterfly hunter! there are birdwings eight inches across, endless varieties of swallow tails, sword-tails, jesters, sergeants, nawabs, tigers, leopards and maps. How fortunate that the great butterfly men were also poets.

Mushrooms, moonflowers, marriages, mason-wasps and moths - it sounds delightful. But there are mosquitos and mould on the debit side - mould that furs a plate of food exposed for a couple of hours, and makes wardrobes smell like coffins and books become white and slimy and the whole bungalow reek like the cheddar caves. And, though it spoils the alliteration, there are also snakes. They are driven out of their holes by the rain, and though one feels sorry for them and knows that very few types are poisonous, the sight of one fills me with horror.



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Notebook: May 17th. Mac away at Sibsager being tried for his cement case<sup>123</sup>, an overcast, sultry day, and an uneasy feeling in my stomach which makes me sweaty & irresolute. We have had rain, cyclones, & more rain, gushing, glittering, sodden days which I love. The cyclone (?) only lasted 5 minutes, we stood on the verandah watching the beech tree break in a white haze of whirling rain, listening to the crashes, the breaking of glass, plunged into darkness as the electric light gave, helpless. Afterwards Mac went off to inspect the damage & I threw the sodden chicks into the Cow-house, sent for candles & I returned to the drawing room & a glass of sherry & a detective story. Next morning the chaos was apparent, trees & branches everywhere, rooves off, thatch ruffled like a bird's wing. Mac was brave about the unbearable sight of shade trees lying across his tea and to-day has planted out more seed – and in five years time, in 5 minutes, will they be broken bodies, arms out across the tea? For what purpose? That, it seems to me is the point of life, to be able to see, feel, sense some wider purpose beyond the small reasons for our actions. The Gita says “Do your work, live your life as best you can, and leave God to take care of the reasons.” Or is that what it says? Perhaps not exactly – more “Do everything you do selflessly, escape from the Ego that drives you on to material gains and you will come to know the Self which is one with every created thing & knows, Knows that this life is transitory & its successes worthless.” Sometimes I feel that clearly, and then I try to visualise a life without human relationships, without Mac & the children, & I can't bear the thought. But love for them should be lost in the knowledge of the temporary, tiny part this life takes out of Time, & even they should be expendable if the Gita's conclusions are to be followed to their logical end. It is a beautifully tolerant book, no trying to lay down rigid laws of belief and behaviour: “Exactly as far as the soul has risen in the struggle does God stop to meet it” Radhakrishnan says “I am the ritual action. I am the sacrifice. I am the ancestral oblation, I am the herb, I am the hymn, I am the melted butter, I am the fire & I am the offering. I am the father of this world, the mother, the supporter & the grandsire. I am the object the knowledge, the purifier, I am the syllable Anon. I am the goal, the upholder, the lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge & the friend. I am the origin & the dissolution, the ground, the resting place & the imperishable seed.” That seems to answer many of my problems, as does: “The Gita does not countenance the doctrine that while God is responsible for all that is good, Satan is responsible for the evil.” “Beyond this world of space-time is the creative purpose of God. We must understand that supreme design & be content to serve it.”

Contentment, unquestioning and complete, childlike, implicit, tranquil. That is what we all seek, and I think the answer lies in the Gita & the Bible & the works of Buddha – the same answer in different words “In as much as ye have done it...” Faith with works.

We have given ourselves as hostages to take once more and have a new hooluk monkey, the same spider armed & solemn eyed charmer as before. He came 2 weeks ago, pale grey, spindly & light as a leaf. Now he is darkening, swinging up the papyr tree, prodding his pointed fingers at beetles, tearing off leaves, tasting & then vaguely letting them fall out of his mouth. He is chewing at apples & bananas, beckoning imperiously for his milk, flinging himself in a screaming rage on his back into his box, clambering out squeeking with straw in his hair – a part of our lives. He loves the dogs, pokes vaguely & squeeks with pleasure when they pass, Bola & Dinah nuzzle & lick him, Candy ignores. How not to become involved in a relationship with him that will end in pain? Non-attachment that is the answer. And yet, remembering the god who made that ridiculous face and fragile body, he must know we must get fond of it.

Iris to Alan, 20th May 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter from school<sup>124</sup>, glad you got yourself there in one piece, though I gather guitars etc. had to follow later. Also glad to hear you enjoyed Newcastle, though I was surprised you were interested in the females - like most mothers I imagine my children to stick at a mental age of about twelve - though when you think of it I was only a year older than you are now when I met Daddy! I'm afraid we can't offer you any eligible females out here, all middle-aged planters wives and madly dull, but we have a tennis court! I agree it would be a good thing to join a tennis club in the summer, David probably knows of one. I've asked various people, Cowans, Macfarlanes etc. to keep an eye open for second hand motor-bikes, as there's probably more chance of getting one in a town and Uncle Alan may hear of one through a patient.<sup>125</sup> Our Sikh carpenter here has just bought one, he goes hurtling about with his beard flying in the wind and falls off at practically every corner.*

*A very muggy week here, but the rain has come again this morning, it always does just when you feel you will go round the bend. For the last two days simply to step outside the bungalow was to break into a lather of perspiration, and carrying the hot little monkey round with his hairy arms round my neck has been almost more than I could bear. He's very sweet though, and getting stronger and more independent every day, I take him out to play in the garden and he swings about on little trees and eats mud and leaves and generally has a whale of a time, while I waste hours just sitting watching him. He has graduated onto bits of apple and banana, he adores the apple but they are rather hard to come by so he'll have to stick to bananas in future, he also adores sugar which he sucks off our fingers and then spends a long time afterwards picking tiny little crystals off his fur and eating them. Another cat has arrived, a Siamese I'm looking after, and I never seem to finish my round of animals meals, exercising, de-fleaing etc.*

*Daddy went up to court on Saturday to be tried for the cement case that he was arrested for eighteen months ago. He went off gloomily muttering that he'd love a bottle of beer every Sunday in jail – and came back a few hours later, having been fined Rs. 100 (about £7). Most of the company managers were there and they all got the same fine, too silly after all the fuss that was made. Daddy's describing of Sibsager court were most amusing, I wish he'd let me go with him, it sounded like a mad house.*

*He's been having a grim week with the factory, trying to get it started with various frightful things happening to bearings and rope drives (I try to understand, but alas can't get the hang of it all). Anyway Daddy has spent his time in the factory and only come back to the bungalow to eat, covered with oil and in a raging temper. Thank goodness the trouble is now sorted out and tea is being made, it's a pity you won't be here when the factory is working as it's quite fascinating to see how all the machines are worked by one engine which turns wheels which turn other wheels which turn the rollers and grinders and sifters. The tea is finally sorted by a fan sucking it through a long tunnel, so that the heaviest bits fall first, and then the next heaviest and so on and finally just the dust is left. Daddy's teas are still the best in the company, nearly the best in Assam, so he is terribly anxious that he should keep up the garden's reputation, and I foresee a harassing summer.*

*We had the Burnets to dinner last night (the one at Sedbergh) and he brought his coloured slides to show us, mostly taken on the Manas. They were beautiful, he has been keen on photography for ten years and had some wonderful animal pictures, wild buffalo, rhino etc. Also lots of enormous mahseer, which we were offhand about but they looked far bigger than the ones we caught. The cook arrived, very tiddly, about ten minutes before dinner, giggling away and quite unconcerned so I was most surprised that we got anything to eat. The man*

who organises the electric lights was also very drunk and our lights kept going on and off all evening, typical Assam entertaining.

I've spent a lot of this week looking for mushrooms, I found masses the first day but since haven't got any, I think the locals must of got wind of what I was doing and beaten me to it. The bearer brings back the most vicious looking toadstools and puff-balls for himself and I expect to hear every day that he has succumbed, but he always turns up smiling.

My Assamese progresses slowly, I find myself able to understand more easily, but still can't speak without long pauses, sighs and groans. The Prime Minister of Assam<sup>126</sup> is visiting the local high school this week to inspire every one with confidence in the face of the Naga menace, last time he travelled in a bullet-proof car with slits for him to see out of and a vast escort of armed police which must have reduced the whole population to nervous wrecks. The Assamese are terrible cowards I'm afraid, they haven't a warlike instinct between them, not that that's a bad thing altogether but it makes them the laughing stock of the rest of India.

It's nice having cricket to listen to, even very crackly commentaries which break off so that we can have the news in Japanese! Yes of course you can have guitar lessons, good idea, I hope the Skiffle group is a success, what do you call yourselves – the Lupton Lads – Sedbergh Six – the Firebrands?

All our love -

Mummy

Iris to Alan Monday 26th May 1958 Cherideo

My dear Alan,

Thank you for your letter, describing the fun and games at the fete, your skiffle couldn't have been too bad if you made all that money but I'm sorry about the guitar string. I'm afraid I haven't got my guitar yet, they're so expensive, but Daddy has asked the locals to look out for a second hand one. A tea-box double bass will probably be the best I can do in the end. I wrote to Pat and Jean<sup>127</sup> this week asking them to keep an eye open for second hand motor scooters so lets hope something materialises in that line.

Nothing exciting in the way of earthquake or cyclones to report this week, but I'm enjoying the uneventful days as I shall soon be having to rouse myself for the move, with the three dogs, two cats and Poo its going to be quite a circus, and there is a large, unfriendly dog and a cat already there.<sup>128</sup> I can see my days being spent in keeping all the animals from chewing each other up and will probably end by casting myself into the river which runs past our back door – the same river we fish in its upper reaches, but no good at Nazira, sluggish and polluted. The more I think about moving the less I like the idea, my garden is looking its best now with all the flowering trees out and everything green and lush, ah well, as Daddy and I keep telling each other, theres always the pool.

Saturday was the big day of the week, as we had a lunch guest and then at two o'clock to go down and visit the Prime Minister of Assam who is touring the district. I had been asked to be President of the meeting to welcome him, and I made Daddy come along too to give me moral support. When we got there we found it was only to be the Finance Minister after all, just as well as the arrangements were somewhat chaotic, I had a little bit of paper handed to me with the list of items which I had to announce, but every time I got up to announce an item I found it had been changed or the speaker had forgotten to come.

The Minister turned out to be a very charming man, and we chatted about this and that and he told me what to do next and seemed quite amused by the amateurishness of it all. I was pleased because he spoke slowly and clearly and I found I could understand everything he said, he spoke for about three quarters of an hour and then one of the M.P's travelling with him insisted on giving a speech which went on and on – by that time the whole party

was due to be going on somewhere else and there were still about six items left on the programme. A youth came on to do a dance, and half way through was unceremoniously hustled off, then came Presidential Remarks – me! I got out a few sentences, and then the whole thing sort of folded up. Really I felt it was my fault for not organising things, but I had no idea what was expected of me. As we were leaving a fierce bearded gent was seeing us off and I thanked him for asking us to come. "Well actually we were damn glad to have you" he said – leaving me speechless. I should think it'll stop them ever asking me to preside at a meeting again, Daddy was most amused (and slightly anguished) at the whole proceedings.

We got back to find that our lunch guest had taken himself off which was a relief as he was an awful old bore, a V.I.P.; out from home who is touring round telling us all how to make tea, as he knows about as much as I do about it Daddy gets more and more infuriated and rude.

Last Monday evening we went in to see the film - "Strange Cargo" about Hong Kong, started off well but petered out without a single decent fight – and then went on to spend the night with the Darbys<sup>129</sup>. I took a sleeping pill and slept till ten the next morning and after a light lunch went back to bed and slept some more – so couldn't have been a very exciting guest. Daddy and Mr Darby went to Jorhat to see the scientific research station there,<sup>130</sup> they have a lot of highly qualified men working out the best way to grow tea, but their ideas are so far-fetched they are quite impractical according to Daddy. I took Poo along of course and he behaved very well, he is becoming more independent every day, on a walk one evening I put him up a small tree and he shot to the top and refused to come down. Even when I walked away he went on unconcernedly eating leaves, luckily the miniature train came along and frightened him down or I should have had to sit under the tree all night. We got our colour film back this week, and on the first showing were terribly disappointed, it was underexposed and we could hardly see a thing, however the next night we showed it much closer to the wall and there was a great improvement and some very effective photos, one beautiful one of the Sibsagar temples and a couple of good ones of the Manas. I do wish photography wasn't so expensive.

I'm still plugging along with my Assamese, I told my teacher the story of King Midas last lesson and when I got to the part where his daughter is turned to gold he clapped his hand to his head and said "Oh my god" – so I felt gratified that something had got over to him! He said he had told his school children the story of Chonderella – I wish I had heard it, I can't believe it had any connection with the original.

Looking forward to hearing of some fishing successes, do hope you get that sea-trout, I don't know what the weather is like at home we get more and more out of touch and I hardly bother to listen to the news even which is all wrong. Granny's birthday to-day, did you remember?

Forgive a dull letter, but really nothing happens. I just drift from dogs to cats to monkeys to guinea pigs to chickens - and so back to dogs!

Much love from us both, Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 10th Jun 1958

My dear Alan,

The most ghastly thought has just struck me - I haven't written to you this week. My excuse is that on Monday, which is the day for your letter, I had people staying, and since then it's been so hot that I have been perfectly addled and been able to do nothing but stagger from one fan to the next, or to the fridge for drinks of water. However it was most remiss, and I'm very sorry.

*The chief topic of conversation is the heat, we have had eight days of it now and are exhausted, though everywhere else in India is having it even worse and with our Air Conditioning and fridges we shouldn't complain – but do nothing else! Even at half past six a.m. it is too hot to walk outside in the sun and the humidity is pressing on our heads like a weight of hot water.*

*I've just driven round the tea with Daddy and it is all coppery with red spider, the worst attack for years, poor Daddy, it's a bit hard when he is just getting over the cyclone. Of course it is bound to break quite soon and then we shall probably have floods and funguses, ah well. We had friends staying for the week end, they came on Sunday evening and we put them into our steamy spare room and disappeared with a cheery laugh into the Air Conditioner.*

*On Sunday morning Daddy played eighteen holes of golf of all dotty things, he was in a state of heat exhaustion after it and felt dizzy on and off for several days. I went to a friends bungalow and he came along and joined us for lunch, it was a terribly hot bungalow and we had lunch at quarter to three and what with the heat and emptiness I felt the nearest to fainting that I have for years. We left immediately after lunch and arrived back here at four and had an hour in the Air Conditioner to revive before our guests arrived.*

*They stayed over Monday and we took them in to Nazira to see "The Tea House of the August Moon", I'd seen it in Edinburgh and enjoyed seeing it again, but most of the other members of the club were completely unamused, something seems to happen to people's sense of humour out here. I must say the club was so hot, with about a hundred people crowded into the one room and no fans, that it took the edge off one's amusement. The friends stayed over Monday night and left on Tuesday morning, and much as I liked them I was very glad to see them go, the effort of gay conversation and keeping the cook sober and coping with Poo was too much.*

*Poo is in good form, growing visibly and getting more solid though still won't let me out of his sight. Carrying his hot hairy little body round in this weather, with his nails digging into my shoulder, is quite an ordeal, but he is very sweet and we get a lot of amusement from watching him swinging on the moonflowers on the verandah. He adores Daddy and cries when he leaves the room, his mouth turns down and he looks quite ridiculously pathetic. His passion is the leechus which are ripe now, a fruit about the size of a large grape, but not nearly as nice, they taste like cheap scent I think. Poo thinks they're heaven though and tries to open the door of the fridge to get at them. My days are organised round his feeding and play times and I get absolutely nothing done.*

*On our way to our friends on Sunday we saw the most extraordinary sight, an endurance cyclist who had been riding round and round the same field for two days and nights and was planning to go on for another two. His bicycle was hardly moving, I don't know how he kept on, and he was attended by two men with umbrellas who were hurrying along beside him, I thought they had the worst of it. Heard he was eventually pulled off the bicycle in a state of exhaustion and has been in hospital ever since – really what people will do for money.*

*Yes, do send me measurements of the guitar, if your friend can make one I'm sure our Sikh carpenter can, he is a magician with wood, you show him a picture of a piece of furniture and he winds a piece of string round one toe and next day he produces the identical thing, perfectly made. Talking of guitars, we went down to see the Indian assistant the other evening and he asked us if we would like to hear a long player of India's greatest musician. I thought it would be interesting, but it turned out to be a series of plink plink plinks on rather a tinny stringed instrument, on and on without any tune or rhythm, I thought I should go mad, and Mr Raj kept saying happily "these long players are wonderful aren't they, they go on for forty minutes", really it was frantic. I like some Indian music, especially the*

drumming, but that! He then played "Green Door" sung to Indian words which was quite funny.

*We shall be moving in two weeks, and I'm longing for the swimming pool, but nothing else, Daddy says he's more worried about the animals than all the rest of the job. Temporarily I shall be Assam's number one Memsahib which strikes me as very funny, considering I wander round in grubby tennis shoes carrying a monkey all day, however it will only be very temporary.*

*I hope the fishing has improved, the weather sounds better, and the Test Match is filling in the evenings, it looks as if New Zealand is going to make an exciting series of it. No fishing here till October, but we'll arrange as much as we can for you. The river is close, but not all that good in January, however its lovely and there's always the chance of catching a monster. Sorry for a feeble letter, but I must get it off quickly and really there is nothing to say except over and over again - its hot.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 16 Jun 1958 Cherideo<sup>131</sup>

*My dear Alan,*

*No letter from any of you this week, so one of the many strikes here and at home has probably held up the mail. I have so little news this week that I'm writing one of these,<sup>132</sup> hope you don't mind. All my diary says is HOT on every page, actually we have had some rain at last one and a half inches the night before last and a few little showers since, but not enough to lift the terrible humidity. I feel like an amoeba or whatever the lowest form of life was weak and flabby and without any will to do anything except slop around. However we're moving a week to-morrow and I really have got to brace myself and get something packed. I've got as far as throwing all our winter clothes in heaps onto the floor this morning, but have now retired to the fan to recover. Yesterday, Sunday, Daddy spent most of the day in bed with a tummy upset, with the Air Conditioner on it wasn't too bad as he had a new Erle Stanley Gardner to amuse him,<sup>133</sup> but tripping in like Florence Nightingale with one of his many cups of Bovril it slipped and the whole cupful poured into the carpet. It was the last straw and I nearly flung myself after it and chewed lumps out, it has made a perfectly indelible stain this morning I don't care so much.*

*We heard that it had been a lovely sunny Sunday with you, and pictured you out with a sandwich lunch winkling trout out of one of those lovely rivers, like you I always remember that day up the Rawthey as being just about perfect and often think of it when things are getting on top of me here.*

*Next summer we plan to do a sentimental tour of the Highlands visiting Daddy's boyhood haunts and ending up with a few days fishing in Sutherland. We're going to get a station wagon edition of the Morris we had last time, and take a tent as well as it would be too ruinous for us all to stay in hotels, it sounds heaven but will probably pour and blow from the North East and everywhere that Daddy remembered as being lovely and solitary will be a mass of caravans and Kosy Cafes - never mind, these things are fun to plan and think about and remember afterwards, even if its hell at the time! You must bring out your Where to Fish books with you and we'll plan it all with maps.*

*I had a letter from Pat Cowan saying she couldn't possibly choose a second hand scooter for anyone, but if you liked to spend a day or two there looking round she would be very pleased - so perhaps you could do that after your camp? All else failing it'll have to be a new one on the never never, you might start browsing through catalogues and finding which is the cheapest available. Haven't heard from the Macfarlanes yet.*



*Nothing of interest to report, the Poo is very well and almost walking, he takes a few staggering steps and then falls on his face. I put him in the old chicken run for an hour at lunch time which enrages him and he screams on and off the whole time, I feel its rather cruel but get nothing done otherwise.*

*As I said, we move next Tuesday, 24th, I'm rather dreading it in some ways, but keep thinking of the extra money which we hope to make and the string of servants and the pool and wondering if they will make up for the dreary round of entertaining and flat, dull Nazira.*

*We heard a bit of the Wightman Cup<sup>134</sup> on Sat. but just when it had got to the most exciting stage of the Truman victory we were switched off and made to listen to twenty minutes of dreary old men discussing the world cup, it was absolutely sickening and typical. Granny and Granpa should be enjoying tennis, cricket and racing on the old Telly, not to mention John Certes<sup>135</sup> and those lovely dirt track races. What I wouldn't do for it here.*

*Are you going to the Bradford place? I feel an urgent need here for boys clubs so you must gather information on the running of one, if you go.*

*Thousands of parrots are feeding in the rubber trees quite deafening.*

*'Don't Leave Me Now' is my current favourite. E. Presley, but quite skiffish.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Monday 23rd Jun 1958, Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, we heard the news of the motor bike from Granny and Granpa, and I have been in a mild flap ever since as it is a much larger and fiercer machine than I visualized. However if you're careful, and remember to check up on brakes etc. regularly you should be all right. As I told them, this summer you must be content to potter round quiet roads, down to Windermere and Coniston and over to see Stephen - that sort of thing with perhaps a trip to Sedbergh at the end of the hols if you feel confident enough, but please, no dashing about on main roads at week ends. You really are a bit young for a motorbike and you must promise not to go fast or take it out when the roads are skiddy, or attempt any of these passes Wrynose etc. this summer. Am thinking of you as well as my nerves, because one accident could land you in a bath chair for the rest of your life, and as well as worrying about yourself you've got to think of all the mistakes the other fools on the road may make. So go ahead and enjoy yourself!! I think we had better make the £15 a combined birthday and Xmas do, trust there's no chance of your getting on the first XV this year or we shall be finally ruined?!*

*We move to-morrow and there's a certain amount of mild chaos here, but not too bad. We got our rain – the monsoon – a week ago to-day and it has been much cooler with rain nearly every day since then which just about saved our sanity not to mention the tea. It's warming up again and I feel rather washed out after a morning spent bending over boxes, now there are all the last bits and pieces which upset all my beautifully planned boxes. I find myself having to pack riding boots in with the silver and the monkey's towels with my evening clothes, and then look up and find all the pictures are still on the walls. Mr Yates,<sup>136</sup> who is taking over from us, arrived this morning with two dogs and a cat, so the bungalow is alive with animals all snarling and hissing at each other, huge fun. Daddy is having an exhausting time handing over the tea garden and attending endless meetings at various schools.*

*We went to a prize giving at four yesterday afternoon, it was sizzling hot and we had to leave our Air Conditioner and dress up and when we got there found that nothing was ready. Daddy finally rounded up the various teachers etc. and the programme started, first of all we had some "acts" by the students, awful scruffy youths moaning in Assamese, it was painful. Then there was the presentation of prizes, each student got a little paper book which couldn't*

*have cost more than a shilling, and most of the books were political and deadly dull. Then was "Speeches by the Audience" which Daddy limited to three minutes each, I was gratified to find I could understand most of the Assamese and was quite enjoying the chance to listen to it, but Daddy called a halt after the third speech and the meeting wound up and that was that. All terribly pathetic and when we got back we decided that next year we would show them how a speech day should be run if it was the last thing we did.*

*The evening before we went to an Assamese play given by the Babus, it was all about the bad British as usual and the man who took the part of the Tea Garden manager never opened his mouth without shouting and cursing, not a very good reflection on us I fear but a bit overdone at that. As the audience talked far louder than the actors we could only catch the odd word.*

*Couldn't carry on and now its the next morning and we are leaving in half an hour. The lorry with our luggage has gone ahead, and we are left with dogs, monkeys etc. all looking very miserable and tripping me up at every step. So far no awful crises but I'm keeping my fingers crossed. Will write more coherently as soon as I'm settled.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*



The General Manager's Bungalow at Nazira

Iris to Alan, Sunday 29th Jun 1958, Nazira

*Dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is a couple of days late but I just don't seem to have been able to get to my typewriter for the last few days, and when I've had the time have been too tired to think of writing sense.*

*As you see we are now installed in the Burra Bungalow, but in my trousers and broken down tennis shoes with Poo strung round my neck I'm afraid I make a very poor imitation of a General Manager's wife! It is all quite fantastic and unreal, the bungalow itself is the size of a medium hotel, as well as our rooms there are four other spare rooms with bathrooms etc. attached, endless offices, pantries and store rooms and a billiard room which could fit the whole of Field Head into itself and have some over. I walk literally miles a day in search of scissors and my keys, and servants spring out from behind every pillar.*

*We have three bearers, two odd job men, two drivers, two sweepers, two washer uppers, a cook, four gardeners and various extra women who come in to pick up leaves and sit behind hedges drinking tea out of bamboos. I got so desperate the other morning that I snatched the flower vase off the dining room table and said "Bags I do the flowers" – I really think I shall lose the use of my arms during my time here, except that I will play lots of golf and swim.*

*We moved on Tuesday morning, our luggage on a lorry and Daddy and I, the dogs cat and Poo all panting and miaowing in the car. Mr Lumley Burnley Ellis<sup>137</sup> didn't leave till the next morning so I spent 24 hours trying to keep the animals out of sight and sound as Daddy was worried that they would be a nuisance, every time he and MR L.E. disappeared to the office I dashed round letting out cats and taking Poo for walks. I was very glad when he left and I could relax a bit, but as I feared I was terribly home-sick and for the first two or three days completely miserable, every time Daddy came in he found me moping and saying I wanted to go back to Cherideo. I am beginning to settle down now, and once I make a new routine for myself I shall be all right, I'm a terrible cabbage and like to do the same things every day. The dogs feel the same, and I'm afraid are not going to like Nazira even when they have settled, no nice tea bushes to hunt through, only the golf course and hysterical people waving sticks at them and telling them to sit.*

*I played yesterday morning with a friend, and while we were walking across the polo ground one of the lads who has a small plane decided to take off.<sup>138</sup> As he was taxi-ing for the take-off Candy rushed out and started to bark at the wheels of the plane. I screamed and was nearly sick but she took no notice. Not only did I think she would be made into sausage meat but I imagined the plane would crash and burst into flames if it hit her. However it didn't by some miracle, but my legs practically gave way under me and I trembled for the rest of the round. Bola spent the morning chasing cows and goats round and into us so it was not the most peaceful game of golf I've had, however my play had definitely improved, I've found a book called "The Golf Secret" which tells me I must make myself into an inverted question mark when I hit the ball and it really did seem to work. Daddy and I play a few holes at 6.30 a.m. It is the only time its cool enough to enjoy it. He gives me three strokes at every hole and I beat him. I feel I really might become quite Keen if I could only be sure of hitting the ball. Daddy swims first thing in the morning and we both go in after tea, the water is as warm as milk but its nice. Of course Poo has been the problem, but I've at last got a cage made for him, it covers the whole of a tree and if there wasn't wire round he would play there quite contentedly, as it is his whole attention is centred on how to find a way out, and he usually manages in the end. The first evening I went into the pool he sat on the edge and screamed and when I went within range he leapt at me, so I was paddling around with one arm stuck out of the water and an infuriated wriggling bundle on the end of it. Luckily Daddy came to my rescue.*

*On Saturday we had to give our first tennis party, it is a fortnightly affair and the whole company is asked. I made some cheese straws and worried like mad, but the bearers had the whole thing taped and it went off quite smoothly. Only about twenty people came as a lot are away on leave, and there was enough to eat though the sandwiches curled up at the corners and were rather dry. Bola jumped up into any chair that was left vacant, Candy ate grass and mud and sicked them up in little heaps round peoples feet and Dinah breathed heavily*

*over the cakes and gave the odd lick when she thought nobody was looking – but thank heavens Poo was caged and didn't complete the zoo picture. Still it made for a happy relaxed atmosphere (you should have seen Daddy's happy, relaxed face while it was going on!).*

*We have a whole Air Conditioned suite here, bedroom, bathroom and dressing room, with two powerful machines, and the first two days we nearly froze to death and felt quite ill, now we've got it on a basic and only have them running at half strength. We have our dinner brought to us on trays in here, too too luxurious and out-of-this-world.*

*So far Daddy is finding the work side of it simple compared with running a garden, he rolls off in one of the enormous limousines that are brought to the door by a liveried driver, looking like a Hollywood tycoon only hotter. He has to spend a lot of his day in an office which he finds a bore, but every few days goes out to visit one of the gardens and gets a breath of fresh air. If I want to change a library book or go to the stores for a tin of cigarettes I climb into a car and am driven down the four hundred yards of road, you would be hysterical if you could see me.*

*Mr L.E. has left his polo pony behind and I would like to ride it but forgot to ask him, it is Buckskin, that lovely little fawn pony with black ears and feet and tail who was played by somebody from Takkobarri<sup>139</sup> when you were here - do you remember? I wish I could get one like it for Anne. There are also some miserable looking cows, about fifteen who give a couple of pints of milk a day between them. No chickens.*

*The garden isn't nearly as nice as Cherideo and very neglected, I have got the malis onto some digging and manuring this morning and they look most offended, obviously haven't dirtied their finger nails for years. There are some lovely trees though, and in one of them there is a parrots' nest, not like our parrot but bigger with long tails and brilliant yellow beneath their wings and tail. Two huge pointed red noses poke out of a hole in the tree, the young parrots, they don't seem at all nervous and I must watch them to see how they learn to fly. A whole colony of enormous noisy crows live in another tree and give the dogs a lot of exercise chasing them. None of the dogs is eating well. And I don't think they like it here at all, and the poor little Siamese has to live in a go-down as there is an enormous old Persian cat (called Tingalibam) ready to chew her up.*

*I don't think I shall be able to get any more paper in for the weight so will finish, but will write again in a few days. School will be drawing to a close soon, a pity in a way about the puppies but really they would have been an awful handful.*

*I'm afraid I've included you in the girls letter this week as I'm all disorganised – I got the guitar measurements & will see what I can do, will have to get a picture.*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*



The Office at Nazira

Iris to Alan, Monday 7th Jul 1958, Nazira

*My dear Alan,*

*I don't seem to remember a letter from you this week but quite honestly I've rather lost track of time. The girls will be home by now and you in the throes of exams I suppose, how dismal, what do you get examined on, History and more History?*

*I've now settled into my life of opulent ease (the life is opulent but not us, alas) and have made a groove for myself somewhat like my Cherideo one, i.e. feeding horses, monkey, dogs guinea pigs and a little green pigeon that had fallen out of its nest. In between this I drink quantities of cold water, learn my Assamese, play fearful golf and swim for twenty minutes every evening. All quite pleasant, I enjoy it when I'm left to myself but I also have to do a certain amount of entertaining which bores me. Haven't really done much yet, but at the back of my mind there is always the thought that I should be asking masses of people to meals.*

*We had one director to lunch last week, he turned out to be very young and someone we had known about eight years ago when he was a junior assistant so was not awe-inspiring. The servants here are so good that one simply has to say "Three for lunch" and leave it at that, though the cook isn't all that reliable. Yesterday we had three friends for lunch and I told him we should want plenty of rice with the curry so the bearer staggered in carrying what looked like a spare room bath – full to the brim with rice!*

*It was the monthly golf medal and I foolishly said I would enter and proceeded to play the most fearful golf, the course was very wet and I went into every drain and bog and was nearly hysterical with heat and rage by the end. Most other people played almost as badly which was a comfort. I'm so disappointed as I really thought my book had put me on the right track and I was all set to be future ladies open champ.*

*On Saturday evening Daddy gave me my first lesson in billiards, rather fun though my cue wobbled so much with nerves that I even found it difficult to hit a billiard ball. I don't think I*

*will ever be any good as its obviously quite a scientific affair of angles and moments of impact, but I shall enjoy playing. There is a beautiful table here with every sized cue, but is practically never used. Feel fearfully sporty all of a sudden, what with goff and pills, the exercise is certainly doing me good and I'm sleeping like a log. The dogs and Poo are pretty fed up though, not having my undivided attention.*

*I've had a fearful battle with Poo this week (still in progress) as he is getting more and more possessive and now that he's getting strong we have endless wrestling matches whenever I want him to do something he doesn't agree with. The other day he literally tore my dress off when I tried to put him back in his box and my arms and shoulders are a mass of scratches from his nails when he digs them into me – on top of the heat it was getting too much so I've been introducing a little discipline, or trying to. I hate having to biff him but the only alternative seems to be divorce, as Daddy gets fed up when he comes back from the office after a long day to find Poo leaping all over the tea table, and his cigarettes and matches lying in sodden heaps all over the floor. The pigeon is fledged and can fly a little, I keep it in Poo's cage and it is very tame and friendly and sits on my finger while I feed it berries, of course I shall never want Daddy to shoot green pigeons again.*

*We went to the club on Monday to see the "Feminine touch", a film about nursing and the most fearful drivel I thought but everyone else was moved to tears so I must be cynical. It wasn't a patch on Emergency Ward 10. Daddy played his first game of polo for years and has been groaning and clutching his ribs ever since, but is going to play again to-day – on a borrowed horse of course. We've managed to get quite a lot of Wimbledon and the Test Match, the Australians seem to be wiping the floor with everyone at everything. We've discovered one hour of classical music a week which we try and not miss but yesterday our guests sat on and we did miss it. Heard a new Paul Anka this morning which was better than usual, I shall listen to the hit parade this evening for the first time in ages.*

*I gather everything is in flood, better than drought for fishing I suppose, do hope you get that 1-lber. Where are you going for your O.T.C. camp exactly?<sup>140</sup> And address.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to her children, Friday 25th Jul 1958, Nazira*

*Darlings,*

*I don't know if any of you will be at home, but I don't know any other addresses so this will have to wait for whoever arrives first. Anne will be on her pony trek and the Fish lighting lots of jolly camp fires in Hampshire but perhaps Alan will be there - or camping too? Complete silence about that. Anyway thank you all for your birthday letters which arrived right on the dot and cheered me up no end, was feeling a bit flat as there is simply no way of being entertained here and of course Daddy had to spend the day at the office as usual - but all your letters and lovely cards made me feel much better –please thank Granny for hers too. Luckily a travelling salesman arrived and I was able to choose myself a birthday present, some very pretty sandwich covers and napkins. Daddy spent the whole day moaning that he hadn't got me a proper present, but really it's impossible to get anything out here and I would much rather not waste the money on rubbish.*

*After dinner we drove out to Gargaon Palace (the five story ruin near here) unfortunately there was no moon but it was quite eerie wandering round the dark stone passages and I was sure we would hear the slow drip of blood or come across a couple of Ahom ghosts, lots of murder and intrigue must have taken place there, one story in my history book tells of someone who had a grudge against the king and penetrated a guard- seven thousand strong. He stuck a dagger into the king and got out again, but imagine his disappointment when he found it was the king's mother he had murdered by mistake! We took the dogs and I was sure*



*they would fall off the edge of the parapets, we lost Candy and Daddy had to trail round with a torch up and down crumbling staircases, she had got lost and they went round in circles for sometime before they met up. So finished my birthday, not exciting but peaceful!*

*To-day is Saturday and the week for our tennis party, but it is raining fairly solidly at the moment, 9.30, so with any luck it will be off. Actually I don't really mind these things now, the servants do it all practically. I don't know whether to get the courts ready though, if the sun does come out for an hour or two everything dries off. It's been wet every morning this week which has kept it cool, Daddy was supposed to be flying this morning, one of the managers has his own little plane and he was going to take him for a tour round and I'm quite relieved that its off.*

*I seem to have spent the week alternately struggling round the golf course and worming the dogs. I've found a new book on golf which tells me that, the only thing to worry about is your hip tilt, I've been tilting my hips in my sleep, the effect on my golf is peculiar, I either hit the ball miles or not at all. The golf course is under water a lot of the time so your ball just lands with a splosh in a puddle and doesn't move, the doctor's wife who lives next door is quite keen and not very good so we play together, plus the six dogs and sometimes Poo. Little Bola has been very listless and thin lately so I took him along to the hospital to have a blood slide, I thought it might be tick fever but it wasn't so I wormed him and he is much brighter already, also did Dinah who isn't listless or thin but her coat is stiff and falling out and she is covered with a sort of scurfy skin trouble which may be worms or may be the hot weather. I have very little milk here and tinned milk is almost impossible to get (a large tin of powdered milk costs Rs22 - about 30/- ) so the dogs just get meat and some chapatti twice a day and I don't think their diet is varied enough. It is madly expensive feeding them all, they cost more than we do. Poo is well and getting a little more independent, he will play by himself as long as I'm not in sight but I have to keep someone posted at the bottom of the electricity posts to prevent him shinning up them. I wished I'd had a cine camera the other day, the pigeon flew down and sat on my arm and started pecking the banana that Poo was eating and flapping its wings in his face, he was furious and kept trying to push it out of the way and finally tried pulling out its tail feathers - so it flew up and sat on his head. You should have seen his expression, like an apoplectic general who has had a ripe tomato dropped onto his bald pate!*

*The kittens opened their eyes yesterday and are beginning to lurch round and will be terribly sweet in another week - and one more thing to waste my time over. The cats are quite friendly now but I wouldn't trust Tingalibam with the kittens, so will have to devise some run or cage for them.*

*Do you know who turned up yesterday morning? Betty Dykes, your old Ayah.<sup>141</sup> She was looking very well and not a day older, I showed her photos of you all and she squealed and said how beautiful you were!! Elizabeth, her daughter, is married and about to have a baby. She has a job quite close to here and is looking forward to seeing you all when you come out, I warned her that you wouldn't remember a word of the language but I daresay you will manage to understand each other by means of her extraordinary English.*

*My teacher came on Wednesday, I had lent him my Shakespeare and he was full of a scheme to translate Hamlet into Assamese and act it at Cherideo. He asked me if I would help, can you imagine me getting to work on Hamlet with my Assamese, it would be the laugh of the century. However I was most encouraging and I do hope he gets on with it, it should be absolutely wonderful! I am working for several hours a day here, and enjoying reading the folk stories and legends in my books but oh dear, it's a slow business and I don't think I will ever be able to talk fluently.*

*It looks as if it was going to clear up, now for the big decision. "Are you Sincere" is still at the top of the hit Parade here, with "Twilight Time" second. What do you think of Laurie*

*London's latest effort? I've got no particular favourite at the moment, rather like Frank Sinatra singing "Tell her you love her", the usual drippy choice.*

*I'm longing to hear about treks, camps etc. and do hope the weather has been kind, it sounds as if it has been better. We get the Test Match and sometimes the Empire Games every evening.<sup>142</sup> We've been in Nazira a month now, it's flown past and hasn't been nearly as hectic as I'd imagined. Daddy finds his job here dull compared to a garden, he has to compose masses of official letters which strains his grammar somewhat, sometimes brings them up for me to get to work on which is rather fun. I hardly dare open my mouth in public as he tells me so many highly confidential things.*

*Thought the enclosed might interest Alan, Michael Crow who was at Sedbergh says the Lune was never considered much of a sea-trout river – now the D----n [Duddon]! There's a decent little stream!*

*Lots & lots of love – from us both – Mummy*

*Iris to her children, Sunday 10th Aug 1958 Nazira*

*Darlings,*

*Thank you for your letters, Anne's from Katherine Shepherd and Alan from school, giving the exam results which we were delighted with, do hope you got that award. We couldn't quite understand the little lines of figures and remarks in your letter, but we did gather you were top in History and second in English, so you really don't have to worry too much about the ghastly A level next year. We haven't heard from the fish for some time so I hope she has managed all her journeys all right. I'll send Anne's next letter up north, Alan goes to Iwerne when? Am dying to hear about the motor bike, do hope its a success.*

*I am feeling better and beginning to get over Poo<sup>143</sup> though I still get awful stabs of unhappiness if I think about him too much. We had the Edyes to stay last week end and I had to try and forget myself and be sociable, a good thing really. On Sunday I played golf, the course was half under water and we all spent our time landing our balls with a splash into the middle of it and then waiting about while small boys held their noses and dived for our balls, I wished I'd had a cine film of it – golf in the tropics, how mad dogs and Englishmen spend the monsoon. We all lost several balls and got muddy and maddened – but I suppose it did us good. I played very badly, but on Thursday I went out with a couple of girl friends and suddenly seemed to get the hang of it, my ball just went click, click, soaring away into the middle distance every time. I haven't dared go back and see if it was a fluke or all my reading has really born fruit.*

*We got an awful fright while we were playing, as Dinah suddenly leapt up into the air with a fearful scream and when we looked to see what was wrong there was a snake. Of course we thought she had been bitten and didn't know what to do, just sat trembling in the grass saying "Tell Mummy where it hurts then" in a fatuous sort of way. But after running our hands up and down her legs and all over her we couldn't find a tender place and as she was leaping happily about, delighted to be the centre of attention, we decided it couldn't have actually bitten her, she must have jumped out of the way in time and screamed out of instinctive fright. It was a brown, harmless looking snake and probably not even poisonous, but we all tottered weakly along for the last few holes, nervous wrecks.*

*The Edyes left on Sunday evening, we entertained them after tea by taking them round the Nazira graveyard which is just behind the bungalow! Like all graveyards out here, it is full of sad little childrens' graves, sometimes two or three of the same family and the mother as well very often, it must have been grim out here a hundred years ago with no defences against the tropical bugs or the heat. Which reminds me, we heard of Lord Bracken's<sup>144</sup> death yesterday,*

*it will be a blow to Sedbergh, and to Robert too I expect. He wasn't very old, I wonder what was wrong with him.*

*Saturday morning and the week of our tennis party, and as usual it is drizzling and we don't know whether to get things organized or not. I've just been down to the kitchen and made some eclairs for them, fairly successfully, but what with the stale eggs and damp flour nothing ever quite works. The cook makes wonderful cakes, so I fear the fault must lie with me. I had one of my sleepless nights last night, I only have them about once a month now but usually when I least want them and I seem to have got used to my sleeping pills as they don't work very well any more. When I can't sleep I find Assamese words and phrases whirling round and round in my head, perhaps that's why I can't sleep, because I'm really too old to try and learn a whole lot of new words and my subconscious is protesting.*

*The kittens are getting very sweet, leaping about and tumbling out of their basket to greet me when I go to see them. I moved them out of the rather smelly go-down they were in, as I was carrying them over a slippery drain I fell flat on my back, kittens showering in all directions and landing with a smack on the cement, frantic mother cat pouncing and trying to pick them all up in her mouth in the same time, you can't imagine the confusion. She apparently has a habit of carrying them off into the jungle and abandoning them at a certain age, but she won't be able to do that here as they are shut into the mosquito room. I've almost persuaded Daddy to let me keep one.*

*Daddy has fixed to take a week end off and we are going to Shillong for two nights on 22nd. We are very thrilled, just to get out of the heat for a little will be bliss, and we are planning to visit all our haunts and take Dinah for walks in the pine woods and put jerseys on in the evenings. I gather Shillong is very drab and dull these days, but the country will still be nice. By the time we come back it will be nearly September and the end of the hot weather in sight.*

*I went to Cherideo on Tuesday to see how things were getting on, but rather wished I hadn't as everything looked neglected and needing attention, and I wanted to get down to it there and then. Two of my hens survived and the guinea pigs look well but otherwise the place is a mess. I shall look forward to getting back, I shall miss the wonderful servants here but otherwise nothing. The rice planting is in full swing now and its so pretty, the flooded fields dotted with tassels of brilliant green rice and the women moving through them in their coloured clothes, bending and stretching like birds as they plant. Talking of birds; my green pigeon finally took himself off, he was free for a week and always came back but one day he didn't, I think he would be all right as he flew well.*

*The hit parade here—*

*I Twilight Time*

*Tell her you love her*

*Witch Doctor*

*He's got the whole world in his hand.*

*I'll Remember To-day*

*Are you Sincere?*

*Teacher's Pet*

*Wonderful Time Up there*

*Terrific Together.*

*Didn't think much of the number one at home, which they played for us. How's the guitar?*

*Write lots — we envy you the Telly — but bad luck about Pat Smythe.<sup>145</sup>*

*Lots and lots of love,*

*Mummy*

Iris to her children, Monday 15th Sep 1958 Nazira

*Darlings,*

*I think this will catch you on the eve of your departure for school, poor Granny with all those ghastly trunks to pack, but I expect you can more or less cope with your own now. Wonderful to think that we shall be seeing you at the end of the term, can't really believe it and don't suppose I will until I see you all stepping off the plane, each three yards taller and towering above me I fear.*

*We have got one pony booked, Bifty, a very portly and not very young gentleman, but he can play polo and will do for hacking though would probably fall down dead if you asked him to jump. The Indian assistant on the garden is hoping to get another, and will always let you borrow it I'm sure...*

*Thank you for your letters, thank goodness you had a little summer at last, I wonder if there were any mushrooms. I can sympathize with Fiona over being taken out of the "Wind cannot Read" - never mind, I want to see it, so we'll sit through it twice and howl ourselves sick. I wonder how you liked the tattoo Annie,<sup>146</sup> we heard a bit of it on the wireless and they said it was the best ever.*

*September is being beastly hot so far, but we don't mind too much as we know its nearly the end. Our tennis party was off last Saturday which was nice, though a few people came in on spec and ate the cakes I had hoped would last us all week. On Sunday it was the medal round at golf (a monthly competition to win a silver spoon) I played with Bette Ross, not in the competition, but for fun, at least it was supposed to be fun but it was hell as we didn't start till nearly ten and I nearly collapsed with heat exhaustion. I had put on a sun top in the hopes of keeping cool, and the result was I got burnt to ashes. I can't remember when I have been so roasted alive, my back and shoulders were the colour of raw beef and I'm still peeling a week later. Daddy wasn't very sympathetic as he had told me it would happen. I've been looking like a patchwork quilt ever since with white and red stripes and squares all over my neck and shoulders. Added to this I've had an attack of Piles this week, a very painful complaint but don't ask what it is as its rather rude, look it up in the dictionary. It makes sitting down very difficult, I can tell you that much.*

*On top of my troubles I've been worrying rather over Bola who is far from well, I can't make out what the trouble is, he's not feverish but just won't eat and has no life, and is desperately thin. I've been trying to tempt him with raw liver and nicely cooked chicken and milk and eggs but he is still a misery, I do hope he'll recover before his owners come back. If only we had a decent vet, but there just isn't anyone. I heard yesterday that my biggest and best cow (Primrose) had a heifer calf on Saturday night and the calf was dead in the morning - so bang goes my milk for another year as cows out here won't milk without their calves, not to mention the calf which I badly need to take her mothers place, as Primrose is getting old. It's certainly been a mixed blessing this move.*

*I went out to Cherideo on Friday to plant the first of my seed boxes, I do hope some of the flowers will be out when you're here, normally my wonderful plans of a herbaceous border ends with everything being ready at different times and half the flowers not appearing at all. I should have wonderful sweet peas anyway as Granny and Granpa sent me some from home and I shall plant each seed myself with a handful of superphosphate and brood over them like a hen. Cherideo was badly in need of attention and I'm dying to get back, shall spend the first week head down in the garden.*

*I've got homes for all the kittens the last one is going to a young man called Mr Mogg<sup>147</sup> I met at Sonari on Saturday. I got an awful fright the other morning as when I went in to feed them they weren't there. I searched the house and then started sailing round the garden and finally got as far as the river - practically in tears by this time as I was sure Anna had taken*

them out into the Jungle for the Jackals to eat. I got all 24 servants onto looking for them, and finally they were discovered in a drawer in the office – I could have wrung their necks I was so relieved to see them. One of them went off the other evening to our accountant, he owns the fierce bull terrier and I was a bit worried about it, but apparently the bull terrier took it over and started flea-ing it and they are great friends. Really, I've had more worry over Jock (Bola) and Anna than all the rest of my animals put together.

I was interrupted in the middle of this letter and missed the post yesterday, an Assamese girl came to me, she is staying with her brother who is in the company, a nice girl but I just couldn't pluck up courage to talk Assamese to her. She wants to study law, but her mother wants her to stay at home and get married, so the poor girl is a bit frustrated. It's still quite a new idea for girls to get jobs here. I find it terribly difficult to get anything done in Nazira, nearly every morning somebody blows in and by the afternoon it's too hot and I'm too tired to get down to it. I haven't even cut out the skirt material I brought down from Shillong, plain navy to wear with a couple of loose sort of smock shirts which I find cool in this weather, a vaguely (very vaguely!) Chinese effect.

We had the Church of Scotland padre staying with us for the week end, he arrived on Saturday at mid-day and was all set for a gay time, brought tennis racquets etc. with him but as there was nothing on here we took him up to Sonari that evening to see "Funny Face" with Fred Astaire and Audrey Hepburn. Unfortunately the sound was terrible so we couldn't hear the words, but the dancing was nice. Sonari has changed, lots of new people, but Helen Esslemont<sup>148</sup> still there and much the same, do you remember her?

On Sunday morning we had the service in the club, but there were only six people at it, I feel sorry for clergymen out here as they travel round the countryside for hundreds of miles and then hardly anyone turns out for the services. Peter Innes is a nice little man,<sup>149</sup> like a little monk, but for some reason I felt very tired over the week end so I'm afraid he must have found me a dull hostess. We have a quiet week ahead of us I hope - one never knows here - I do want to get on with my dressmaking and fit in a lot of sleep.

Daddy has just bought a letter from both of you - how ghastly missing your train Fish [Fiona] - it's the sort of thing I dream of nearly every night. Anyway you'll never have to do more complicated journeys, and flying out here will be child's play - and won't take much longer. We think you'll probably come via Zurich and Cairo, it isn't definite yet. Zurich's a beautiful airport, but everything's madly expensive, I've never been to Cairo. You'll probably see the Pyramids.

Longing to hear about school, have you done any of your holiday reading?!

Lots of love from us both darlings - Mummy

Iris to Alan, 23rd Sep 1958 Nazira (Cherideo next week)

My dear Alan,

Thank you for your letter describing the last sea trout, I must try that bit of Duddon next year, I wish we could get a permit to fish lower down. We were amused to hear of David's scooter. I suppose he's got absolutely the last word in gleaming expensive machines, never mind it's much nicer to work up from the bottom really.

A very hot week here, but we imagine it's a different sort of heat, less humid and exhausting with just the hint of freshness in the air. I've spent most of it worrying about Bola who has been lying about lifelessly and crying every time he was moved – finally after every sort of tonic we could think of we gave him three injections of every sort of drug, and at last he's better. Now it's just a question of getting him fattened before his owners come back next month.

*We've heard that the Lumley Ellisses will be returning next week, which is a relief, I'm washing carpets and curtains madly and trying to camouflage stains on the parquet flooring and gashes on the doors where Candy has chewed at them during thunder storms. Also getting lawns mowed, flower beds dug and seed boxes planted out, to the horror of the eight gardeners who are used to spending their days drinking tea out of the watering cans. The last kitten goes to-morrow, and then shall have to get the cat smell out of the bedroom, mend the mosquito netting they have clawed and the mattress they have been sleeping and playing on. Couldn't believe so much damage could be done in such a short time, and we shall probably get the sack for it.*

*The only event of the week has been the festival in honour of the god of engineering (Hindus don't actually believe in a lot of gods, but in one god who manifest himself in many ways). Anyway on Wednesday they are worshipping him as the protector of machinery, so all the cars, bicycles tricycles, and even the garage were decorated with flowers, and we were invited to lunch at the workshops. Here they'd really gone to town with coloured flags and bunches of balloons all over the lathes, and we were given curry (delicious but stone cold) cream cakes and warm, soapy ginger beer. I ate the lot and expected to be violently ill but never had as much as a tummy ache.*

*On Sunday had a couple of young men to lunch, one to collect a kitten, but he didn't turn up till 5 p.m. so I seemed to spend the whole day making conversation and simply sank exhausted into my bed at 10 p.m. and had the best sleep I've had for ages – to Daddy's disgust as he was having one of his rare "bad" nights – not very bad I don't think, but he thinks its terrible to lie awake for ten minutes (hope he doesn't read this).*

*He'll be writing to you any day now about fishing tackle, but unless there's a shop at Sedbergh where you can get line, I think it would be better for us to order it from Milwards. Or can you get into Kendal for an afternoons shopping.*

*What state are your blazers in? I suppose you will need one reasonable blazer and grey flannels to travel in, so if your present one is too derelict you'd better get another. Otherwise you'll live in shorts and sports shirts out here, and we can get these for you when you arrive if need be.*

*We had "The Baby and the Battleship" at the club yesterday, most amusing in spite of being cut. The club is dead, but quite pleasantly so. It's the one thing that'll bore you stiff here but we only go to the films anyway.*

*Looking forward to hearing about your rugger and hope the work isn't too killing, what are you "doing" in History?*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Tuesday 30th Sep 1958 Nazira*

*My dear Alan,*

*We are still not at Cherideo, and don't seem much nearer getting there, the Lumley Ellisses were supposed to be coming back this week but its Tuesday to-day and still no word from them so I can't see them arriving till next week at the earliest. We have taken off and washed all the carpets, covers and cushions and daren't put them on again because of the dogs so its all rather arid and unsettling – however I have a firm belief in everything being planned out for the best and a strengthening conviction that, as the Hindus believe, "Time is Naught"!*

*The only thing I worry about is my garden at Cherideo, this is the time when all the flower and vegetable seeds are being planted out and need a lot of supervision, and I wanted to have a specially good display for you this year. Also I'm having an agonising time here, watching the beans wither and die and the cauliflowers wither and die, and the sprouts and*



*cabbages and carnations wither and die. There seems to be something wrong with the soil, but whatever it is its most distressing and I see shrivelled plants in my sleep.*

*We have just got your first letter from school, and you sound as if you're going to have a most exhausting term one way and another. "History with foreign Texts" is something quite new to me, and sounds ghastly. Is it a vital subject for "A" level, if not why bother with it? I suppose the more subjects you take the better, but it seems terribly cruel to have to swat all that up and then not be told till the last moment whether you are to be allowed to sit for it. I'm sure Robert couldn't have taken it as he was always useless at languages.*

*I feel more and more attracted by the idea of spending my last six years here writing a really interesting and readable history of India, based all the way through on diaries and eye witness accounts. Have even thought out the chapters, each one to be framed round some outstanding character, so as to provide landmarks : "Rama the Exile", "Gautama the Buddha", "Asoka the All Merciful" "Mahmud of Gazni the Marauder", "Akbar the Incorruptible" etc. and end with "Gandhi the Inspiration". I'm sure I could do it if I had access to references, but the trouble is it would involve an enormous amount of reading (which I'd love) but how to afford the books? Wish I could get someone to give me a grant like Robert had - I wonder if his book is out yet, it was due in September I think.*

*Its been a very hot week, but the weather has broken at last and after storms and rain its quite pleasant to-day. October begins to-morrow and the shooting season opens, and at the end of the month is the big religious festival of the year, the Durga Puja which is the official end of the hot weather - and the official start of the fishing season.*

*We went out for a run to the river on Friday morning just to convince ourselves that it was still there, it was quite low after the hot weather but still a bit too milky although I longed to cast a spoon into the white water - and myself after it, it was a stinking hot day! There is a small wooden house by the side of the river which is used for odd assistants when there is a crush, do hope it will stay empty this year and we can go there for days and nights, its a lovely spot. I'm determined to catch a mahseer over two pounds in weight this year, even if I have to bring it back in my teeth (on second thoughts as I haven't a spare set, you'll have to do the retrieving).*

*On Thursday Daddy went up for a flip round in a small plane owned by one of the Managers, and then insisted that I go for a spin. I was most reluctant, I don't mind being carried about by four big engines, but one tiny whirling propeller and a pair of silver paper wings didn't feel at all safe. We flew up to Sibsager and back, only took ten minutes and it was fascinating to see that the whole valley is just a bowl of rice, a rippling, jade green sea of rice split by thin straight roads and watered by the river (the river we fish in its higher reaches) which curls and loops its way into the Brahmaputra. Tiny groups of houses are dotted about, and little glittering water tanks, but the impression is of a canvas washed with emerald green, and a brown shiny snake curling across it.*

*I was quite enjoying all this when the plane suddenly dipped to avoid a flock of vultures and I was quite sure we were going to roll right over, you feel every movement so much more in a small plane. I thought to myself "this will serve Daddy right for forcing me up when I didn't want to go" and was just picturing him tearing the twisted, red-hot metal fragments apart with his bare hands and finding nothing but a tiny fragment of charred cloth which he would clasp to his chest like Gregory Peck and then hold to his technicolour lips when I realised we were nearly home again and nothing had happened at all. I really enjoyed seeing it all but am quite satisfied and don't want another look.*

*The last kitten went on Wednesday and we have more or less drowned the smell of cat in disinfectant, but now I see to my horror that Anna is half way to having another family, this lot will be wild so will all have to go into the river I fear. We have managed to get a horse for Anne when she comes out, but not quite what she has in mind I'm afraid, anyway it looks and*

*smells like a horse and is the best we can manage. Daddy went in to see Air India yesterday and as soon as we hear from them I'll write to Mr Marriot about injections etc. I hope you won't have too much holiday work to do. So glad about the guitar lessons, I hope to be able to get one for Christmas, I wonder how much yours weighs and whether you'll be able to bring it out. I should try and weigh it sometime. The Hit Parade is very dull at the moment and I don't like any of the tunes on it. We have been having some good music from Radio Australia, Chaikoffskis(?) first Piano Concerto this morning which is very well known but I'd like to have. I'm glad you're joining the Musical Society, do you get taken to concerts?*

*That seems to be the lot for this week, really do hope we shall be at Cherideo for my next but somehow doubt it.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

The Assam Company records make mention of this:

October 14th 1958: Mrs. Lumley-Ellis and myself duly arrived back in Assam on the 10th instant and I took over from Mr. Macfarlane. [delayed in flight by three days] Mr. Macfarlane returned to Cherideo Purbut on the 10th instant and took over the management of the garden on that day

Iris to Alan, 22nd Nov 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan*

*Thank you for your letter, we were most amused by the description of Leon Goosen's recital,<sup>150</sup> though I don't expect he was particularly tickled! Do hope the injections are finished by now, the girls were moaning about theirs in their last letter, they had to have three TAB's apparently. Only three weeks till you arrive, I really can't believe it. Poor Daddy is in an awful flap about the car, he sent it up to have the gear box fixed two months ago and the parts still haven't arrived. Still we shall manage somehow, we can use the Land Rover to get to this river and shall have to hire or borrow something to go further afield, if the car isn't ready. I'm restraining myself from making masses of arrangements for you as Daddy wants it to be casual and impromptu, so hope that's all right by you. He wants to teach you to drive and I want to teach you to paint in oils and there is our superb tennis court!*

*A fairly quiet week again, I'm reserving my energies for you. We had the Padre staying last week end, he had a heavy cold but managed not to leave it with us. The service on Sunday was well attended, for a change, the only trouble was that he chose hymns none of us had ever heard of and the pianist couldn't play, the result was a series of low moans from us and the music going on for six bars after we'd stopped singing. We went in his car and it got a puncture just as we were starting for home so it was nearly three by the time we got back for lunch, rather hot and oily with the spirit of Sunday wearing thin in places. Daddy went to bed after lunch and slept till it was dark and got up thoroughly disorganised and bad-tempered.*

*Monday was the film, but it didn't arrive, Doctor at Large which we had seen in Kendal. It came on Wednesday and we went in to see it, quite enjoyed it but they got the reels all mixed up as usual, do hope they'll get a decent film for Christmas. The big event of the week really is the birth of a heifer calf, most thoughtful of the cow as we shall now have plenty of milk for you, though you won't drink it boiled I suppose. I was going to start riding, but for various reasons put it off, am not madly keen at the best of times and my tummy still feels a little sensitive,<sup>151</sup> but the horse must be exercised.*

*The house is still full of carpenters and plaster and wire, your room has had the roof mended and some whitewash, it's rather barn-like but one never goes into the bedroom except to sleep this weather. I'm still gardening, never seem to come to the end of the end of*

*the replanting, its still bone dry and we've given up hope of any rain till Christmas, its probably this mucking about with the moon.<sup>152</sup>*

*We are going up the river to-morrow, as far as we can, Daddy with his new reel so heavens, we ought to catch something. Anyway it's a nice thought, its such bliss to get away from the problems connected with the bungalow and tea garden generally, a day up the river lasts me till about Wednesday of the following week! We shall be going into tennis this p.m. – at the General Managers, the awful things I used to hate – the dust on the roads is too awful just now and I don't enjoy driving anywhere. Rice-cutting starts to-day, it's a bumper crop all over India this and we love watching it. Daddy spends a lot of his time glued to Radio Australia & the cricket which is very faint & crackly & at the most awkward times of day, poor Daddy, wish we could get a better wireless Next letter will be full of instructions!*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Saturday 29th Nov 1958 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*This may be the last letter to reach you, will give all the instructions I can think of. These are only in case I'm held up and can't meet you. Have your luggage taken from the customs to the Airport bus, and don't go in anything else, taxis or whatnot. At the Grand Hotel hand over your wallet with passports etc to the clerk at the desk for safe keeping. He will have some money for you, but I shouldn't collect it till next morning. Don't drink tap water, or eat anything outside the hotel. If I'm still not there by morning, collect your money and do your shopping but don't separate and stick to the shops on either side of the hotel on the main road, don't on any account let anybody persuade to go further afield. I'm sure I shall be there, but this is just in case. Mrs Lumley Ellis will be in Calcutta, and I will ask her to ring up the hotel to find out if all is well.*

*We were sorry to hear that your last injection got you down, they don't often but just occasionally for some reason one has a bad reaction. Afraid your rugger has been well and truly mucked up this term, but I hope it won't have long reaching effects. Mr Marriot didn't seem to mind you coming back four days late, they seem to be working you to death so its just as well to have a week longer holiday.*

*We went on our fishing trip last Sunday, Daddy had his new reel and was getting some lovely over-runs on it, but got the hang of it eventually. We pressed quite a long way up and the water looked delicious but - no fish. I had a bite but nobody else, most disappointing. It doesn't look as if this river is going to yield much this year, but we have been leant a large tent and if you can get permission and avoid the herds of wild elephant that are thundering up and down the river bank, you and Daddy could camp further up and go to the gorge.*

*The Corps (our neighbours) went with us, their child spent his time finding turtles eggs in the sand, a fascinating pastime, you dig with a stick all over the sand and come on little caches. We brought some home with a view to hatching them but they were rather dented by the time they arrived so I fear no little turtles will be pattering round the bungalow for you! We had to leave immediately after lunch to come home for a football match, the final of the Assam Co. competition in which Cherideo were taking part. What with getting impaled on boulders in rapids it took us two hours to get down the river and we only saw the last fifteen minutes of play, it was a draw anyway but in the re-play next day Cherideo collapsed in the last ten minutes and were beaten 5-2. Masses of speeches in Assamese followed, and it was pitch dark before the prizes were presented!*

*We've had two days riotous celebrations here over the opening of the Hindu temple which they've been building over the last year, on the first evening we went down to watch some of it, we wished you could have been there. What with incense, drums, conches and wild*

*ecstatic dancing it was the real East, unfortunately they took us away and served us a rather dull dinner in the school room, they always do, it seems to be their idea of what we like. The dancing was terrific, talk about rock and roll, one man was rolling on the ground in a frenzy and all the others trampling on him unconcernedly.*

*Daddy has been languishing with a heavy cold for the last three days, mostly dust I think, I went up to Dibrugarh to shop yesterday and I'm sneezing and nursing a sore throat to-day. As long as you don't get one. Bring your "Horn Concerto" and a couple of skiffles out if you have room, the Indian assistant has a long-playing gramophone.*

*Will write once more but in case it doesn't reach you, have a good trip, take a new thriller, and your diary and I'll see you at 8 p.m. on Sunday!*

*Much love till then, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 2nd Dec 1958 Cherideo*

*You'll be in a Super Constellation*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm dashing off another short letter as I've just got yours asking if there is anything more to bring. I think you have got everything, I shall look forward to meeting you off the plane in your black shoes, grey socks and underpants!! You didn't mention anything about trousers! Yes bring gymn shoes, and a pair of rugger shorts if you can fit them in to wear until we have knocked some khaki ones up for you, also one of those white shirts (rugger?) to wear in case you feel up to tennis at the club. I mentioned two or three gramophone records if you have room, too, and I should buy a couple of films for your camera at home, they're wickedly expensive here. The lawyer who stayed with us in Nazira (the one who had been to Moscow) has just sent us out three colour films, 36 exposures on each, so we can take 102 colour slides when you're out which will be wonderful. I'll certainly help you with your diary, there's so much of interest here if you keep your eyes open, lots of people find it dull but they don't seem to realise this is one of the richest parts of the world for birds, butterflies and wild animals, not to mention the types of people who come from all over India.*

*We wrote to the Political Officer in the Naga hills to ask if we could go into Naga territory (the river beyond the first range of hills is only three hours walk and has quite a lot of fish) and he wrote back to say that he couldn't give us permission, but as he was a keen angler himself he suggested we joined him for a couple of week-ends fishing and then there would be no difficulty. We think this is a wonderful idea, he should be very interesting as he spends his time touring amongst the Nagas, might even take you along with him for a couple of days. By the way to go back to what to bring, don't bring presents (unless you already have them) as we shall have a day for shopping in Calcutta - it'll have to be a rigid Christmas as far as presents go I'm afraid, you'll have to count the trip out as most of yours!*

*Nothing much since I last wrote a day or two back, our colds still won't disappear in spite of the fact that we spend the whole day in the sun. We went into the film on Monday "The Eyewitness" a rather good thriller, I met the Edyes, they had a good fishing trip up the Dilli, Celia caught 33 fish in the week, the largest 10 lbs. I heard from our friends up the Manas, the fishing wasn't as good as in March but just at the end of the letter one of them had caught a 22 lber - in the same place Daddy caught his.*

*I've already sent you one of these, I wonder if it went astray anyway herewith another with the route marked. A very long dull flight from Beirut to Bombay but you'll probably be tired enough to doze for most of it. So sorry to hear about the arms, do hope you managed to be unstiffened for the house rugger. Sedbergh seems to be having a very good season this year, wonder how they did against Loretto.*

*Can't think of any more last minute instructions, have a lovely trip, longing to see you,  
only 11 days.*

*Much love, Mummy*

# Diary of Visit to Assam, 1958-9

by Alan Macfarlane



Alan, Iris, Anne and Fiona on the verandah of Cherideo bungalow

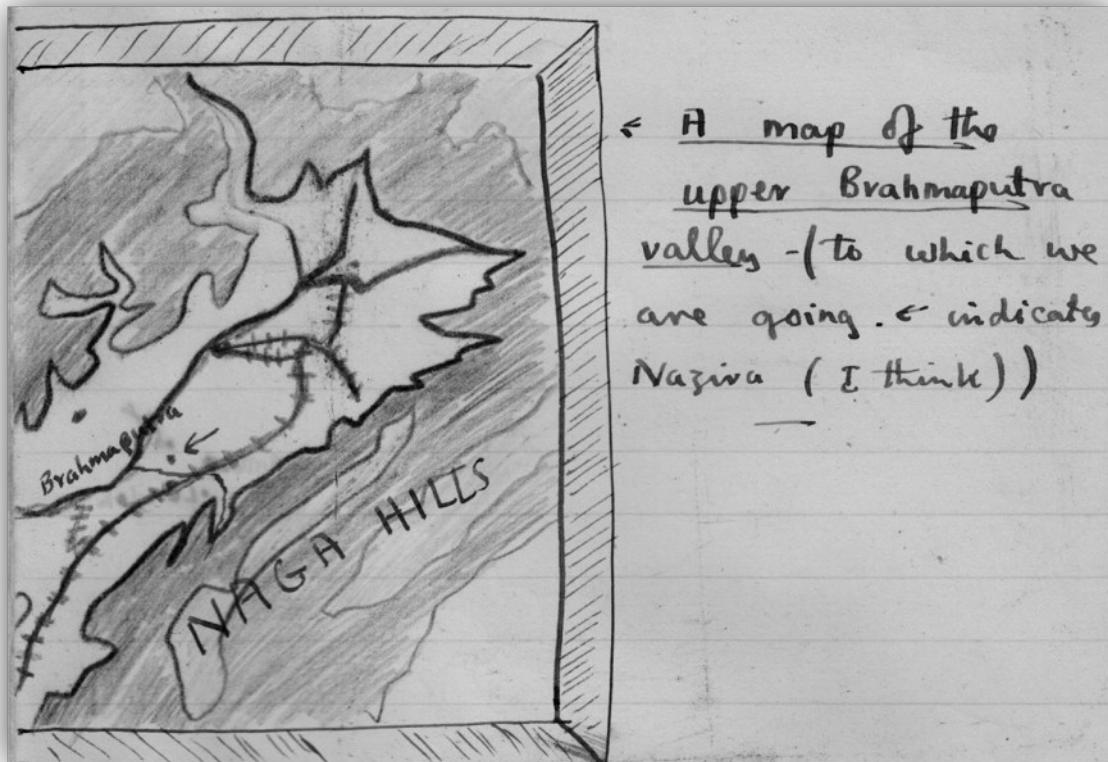
I had been born in Assam in 1941 and left shortly after my fifth birthday, in early 1947. I went back once for my eleventh birthday, but have only a very few fragmentary memories of that trip. This visit with my sisters, which included my seventeenth birthday, Christmas and New Year, is much more vivid, and probably reinforced by the detailed diary which I kept and have skimmed through a few times since then.

It was to have a profound effect on my thoughts and my emotions, feeding into my career choice later in life. The visit stretched my mind and gave me new goals and plans. It encouraged my writing. It formed new bonds with my parents and I began to understand the life my mother wrote about in her letters, and to sympathise with her frustrations. Beforehand my letters from school suggest I was only really interested in the fishing opportunities and having enough tackle and hooks to catch a very large mahseer.....

## Holiday Diary

Compilers: A Macfarlane, Anne Macfarlane<sup>153</sup>





### Specifications of the planes

The constellation:-

Is 95 ft long – with a wing span of 123ft and an all-up weight of 107,000 lb. Powered by four Wright Cyclone engines, giving a total of 10,000 h.p. on take off. It has an average cruising speed of 272 m.p.h at a cruising altitude of between 12,000 and

### Friday 12th December

We started from Windermere station at 11 o'clock, hoping to get to London by five. We had left home at about 10, with the rain sweeping across the valley. The snow, which has fallen the day before and was lying quite thickly (about an inch) – is turning into slush, and we squelched out through it and the rain to load up the taxi with our few odds and ends (4 suitcases, 3 coats, 2 tennis rackets, 3 bags (or knapsacks), 2 fishing rods, guitar and Fiona.) So far there has either been misty or pelting rain all the way down (we are just beyond Warrington). The countryside is grey and drear, the trees leafless, and a smoky pall hanging over the rows of houses which compose Warrington, Wigan etc. Well we arrived at London (approx. an hour late) and after a bit of a rush around London we are settled in the Vanderbilt hotel. We went to Angela and Roberts for dinner and had a very good meal, and a homely chat about old times ("By-the-way") etc. the flat is very nice, with a beautiful concealed lighting etc, but it is rather a way from the centre of London. We arrived back at the hotel at about 10-0 and after a bit of confusion when we were trying to work the lift we arrived at our rooms. The rooms are very nice and the bed is jolly comfortable and I am feeling very sleepy and ..... (snore)

### Saturday December 13th

We were woken up at about twenty to seven and have been in a moderate flap ever since – but so far we seem to be alright. It is a miserable morning – the rain is sheeting down, it will

be nice to get above it! Having arrived here gasping at about ten to nine we found that the plane is approximately 2 and a half hours late, and we are not leaving here (the terminal) until 11.45. Still for some reason we have got a free snack at the caffè here – which is not so bad. Fiona has a bad cold and is sneezing or blowing her nose most of the time, and Granny is a bit under the weather too – oh for some sunshine!

We are now flying somewhere above Southern Germany. We left London in the rain at about 1.5, and after about twenty minutes we were out in bright sunshine. The clouds were beautiful below us, like snowy fluffy mountains. We hit a few bumpy air-currents over the channel but we were still able to enjoy the jolly good lunch they gave us. (Steak. Pineapple soup etc) At about 2.45 we arrived at Dusseldorf. We walked round the airport for about 30 mins and bought a few postcards etc. Now we are up again heading for Geneva (we hope to get there at about 5.30. On the bus from the air terminal (which took about 40 mins) a distinguished looking man sat down next to me. He was a keen fisherman and was just flying out to Montreal on some business – he seemed to have fished in almost every part of the world, Alaska, Kenya, Canada, S. America. He mentioned that he had written several books, and that he was quite used to speaking on the wireless (the last time was with Spencer Chapman). He was obviously quite a big-wig. When he went he asked me to write to him about the Mahseer fishing, his address was ‘Lord Tweedsmuir’, c/o House of Lords

We left Geneva at about 7.15 and now have a long spell ahead of us – 7 hrs. Geneva seemed very like Dusseldorf. Again we were only allowed just into a sort of reception lounge – which was very smart. The plane is drooning on through the night, and it is very hot, but seats are extremely comfortable. We are just about to have another delicious meal.

Sunday 14th December [Anne's handwriting]

We have now left Beirut, and are just climbing up. We arrived there at about 2 o'clock in the morning and although it was the first place at which we had ear-ache nevertheless it was the most exciting landing. There was a terrific thunderstorm on the horizon lighting up the whole countryside from time to time, while the city lights were wonderful. We were flashing a red light from under us as we landed which lit up the engines – with their leaping blue flames roaring from the exhaust – in a weird way. I have not had much sleep yet, but we do not get to Bombay for 9 hours so I hope to have a bit of a snooze – we are travelling over Bahrein now – it is 0630 by G.M.T and we are at an altitude of 13500 ft. – speed is 285 m.p.h and the outside temperature 5 degrees C.

-

[Alan's handwriting] We are on our last lap to Calcutta, we left Bombay about ten minutes ago. It was not much of a place really, although it was a new building (and so of course there were hoardes of Indians hanging round admiring it (and the aeroplanes). But there was no place where you could buy postcards etc. I have discovered that we were flying 2 hours late the whole way, and then the co-pilot of this new plane was sick, and so we had to wait for an hour for a new man to be brought here. There was a fine sunset however, the red lingering over the twinkling blue and green lights of the airport. I had a long chat with a nice little official who sounded very mournful as he should have got off at 4.15 and it was well past six (he was especially mournful as he had a 'date') This flying is great fun; the only trouble being that we seem to be going so slowly! I'm always wishing we could get to Calcutta – still we're nearly there now.

-

[Iris's handwriting] Calcutta. This is us at 11 p.m. on arrival – 3 hours late, and not in the mood to be delayed any further. It took us quite a time to get through the customs as a rabbit-toothed officer insisted on opening one of our boxes. However he ignored the piles of glistening Christmas gifts and [Alan's handwriting] films. Then after having our photo taken

we drove back to the hotel. On this drive we received our first impressions of India. Calcutta is perhaps not the best place to get these impressions – especially in the squalid outskirts. We seemed to be passing an interminable string of lanky pigmy cows and shouting boys. Flanking the road were rows and rows of mud built smelly little huts, with groups of people sitting or squatting outside them, huddled round miserable fires. At last we reached Calcutta and the Grand Hotel where of course they kept us waiting arguing at the reception desk. At last we reached our rooms which were very pleasant – air conditioned – and it was here we had our first skirmish with the porters. Every wall had a notice on it saying “NO TIPS!” but it seemed the done thing for the porters to try and wheedle money out of you. After every little job they would hang round you goggling expectantly, like overfed goldfish waiting for their food. After parting with quite a large amount of rupees it was the last straw to find that on our bill we had kindly payed the porters 38 ruppees for tips (we were awake in the hotel for about 6 hours – over 6 Rs per hour for tips!)



Arrival in India - the official photo

Monday 15th December The next day we spent shopping, phew it was hot – of course Mummy kept saying “what a nice cool day” while I sat panting! Calcutta is a pretty awful place. Once you get a few yards from the artificial splendour of the main street the streets become filthy and the people are obviously poverty stricken. People wander about in dirty clothes, bare footed among the innumerable man-drawn buggies and the occasional American car or yellow-topped taxis. There are obviously many accidents as the streets are thick with pedestrians and speeding cars, cars and bugeys. The only qualification for driving a car seems to be the ability to pull or push a horn constantly. Some of the taxis we went in had some amazing noise-making instruments – making screeching wheezing or blaring noises. The pavements were lined with mattresses on which the hoardes of people slept on the pavement – and every few yards there was a stall selling some fruit or coins or fish. Mummy felt sick in the evening so we went into supper by ourselves. When we came back we were looking forward to a good night’s sleep with the

prospect of having a to get up at 5 in the morning to catch the plane – it was then that Paul Lombard stepped in. Just outside our window at 12 o'clock a sort of cabaret started up. With wretched rock and roll groups and a 'popular' American singer Paul Lombard yelling into a microphone – they went on to about 2 o'clock in the morning!

Tuesday 16th December We caught the Dakota up from Calcutta at about 9.15 (about half hour late) – but we had a good trip up – stopping at Gauhati after about an hour and a half. On the way up to Gauhati Fiona and I went into the pilots cabin and had a look around. We had a wait at Gauhati (while they tested the engines, for the Prime Minister of Assam got on there) then flew on to Tejpur. The last hop again taking about 30 mins was to Jorhat. The weather which had started off very nice was beginning to break and there were some spots of rain as we drove towards the bungalow. The roads though a little bumpy were not too bad, though a bit dusty where they were not tarmacked. Beside the road lay fields and fields of rice, and some jute. It was mostly cut and looked like straw in the dried up paddy fields. Occasionally we would come to a mud and thatch village with people selling piles of fruit especially oranges. In Assam also the two most frequent road users apart from humans are cows and bicycles. Though the cows are thin and lean the Indians do not look poor – they are better dressed than in Calcutta – and happier also. Occasionally also we would pass small bits of jungle – clumps of tall trees with large leaves and densely clothes [sic] with long luxuriously drooping vines. This sort of scenery was typical of most of the roads in the lower valley. At last we came through the garden and approached the bungalow



Cherideo garden and bungalow

as you can see it is quite big, with large airy verandas and hundreds of doors and windows. The floors are of a red slippery stone with no cracks rather like dark red marble. We met Daddy (who is looking very well) Dinah – black and Candy (rat-like dackshound) also there are the two cats – Buttons and Anna.

Wednesday 17th December A pretty miserable sort of morning. At least apparently it is my [sic] Indian standards – by ours it is pretty warm – there are occasional light showers but by the afternoon it had cleared up so we decided to go down and have a look at the “Pukri.” [note: Pond-reservoir] It is about 200 yards long by 85 across and about a depth of 20 ft in the middle. The banks are steep and about 6 feet high and bare – there is only one decent sized tree. As we had bought a rubber dingy at Calcutta we wanted to try it so while Anne road [sic] her horse along to the jungle Mummy and I paddled up and down once or twice trolling a bait behind us. Although the boat went well the fish did not seem in a taking mood so we drove back in the Landrover. In the evening we had a “jam” session – first of all playing all the records on the electric gramophone which we have just borrowed for the holidays – then I got out my guitar and Daddy played the wire brushes (I am just making a string base – out of a tea-chest).

Thursday 18th December This morning it was pouring with rain – sheeting down (apparently fairly unusual at this time of year). I spent the morning getting my fishing tackle together – but in the afternoon it had cleared up a bit so we all went out in the jeep. Daddy with his gun in the offchance of getting a ‘jungli moorghi’ (jungle cock) – a fine sporting bird which tastes lovely and has beautiful feathers. I drove some of the way and having stalled it several times I began to get the knack. Dinah put up some J.M’s but Daddy was too far away – however we put up one on the way back and after a bit of tracking Daddy shot it – a lovely cock. In the evening we had to go into the club as Mummy and Daddy are organising a Christmas party for the children (Father Christmas’s riding on Elephants – magicians – treasure hunts etc) – the club is a lovely place – of which at least half the rooms must have a bar in them (6 rooms I worked out had direct access to the bar) – we met the Pooles here Tom, Kathleen, George (12) Jimmy 10 – we got back fairly late and were glad to get back.<sup>154</sup>

Friday 19th December It started fairly dimly in weather but improved so that there was lovely sunshine by the afternoon. We spent most of the time lazing around, Anne riding, Mummy writing letters but at four we went into the club. We went to put up the decorations for the childrens party which Mummy and Kathleen Poole are organising. We managed to hang up quite a few decorations before Daddy arrived (very annoyed – the car had not come back for him!) Hundreds of odd people turned up and alternately decorated and had a drink at the bar (including the Davis’s<sup>155</sup>). Then we came back at about 7.30. We were all tired and as a result there were some slightly heated words when we discovered we had to go to an ‘Assamese Play.’ Actually it was quite good fun – for although we were hungry and didn’t understand a word it was quite amusing. All the stage scenery was muddled up – there were Roman arches, trees, a sea with islands on; and it was meant to be the interior of a room! Also we could see the prompter hopping about behind scenes, and in some of the fights they really seemed to lose their temper, knocking each other about. We got back at about 10 and had some dinner – then some skiffle (we had made the tea-chest base) and to bed.





Saturday 20th December Among other things I got a terrific book on Mahseer fishing for my birthday (which is to-day) – it is by Macdonald and is the classic on the subject. Most of the morning we spent preparing for the children’s party which Mummy and Catherine Poole are arranging. It was to start at 3.30 so we went in at about 2 to finish off the table (food) and the treasure hunt. Mummy and I layed the treasure hunt and after several mistakes (such as laying the clue at the place to which it directed people) we did this. The food was piling up and soon the children arrived. They were aged from the ages of 2-13. The only really nice boys being Jimmy and George Poole. After a short while when people stood around not knowing what to do we began to get moving. The treasure hunt was quite successful and so were the funny men ‘Cappy’ Davis and Roy Boswell<sup>156</sup> – they were a ‘scream’ as they tripped up (Roy was pulling ‘Cappy in a cart) and got all tangled up - at last however they were rescued – but apparently they were slightly hurt. Then there was tea (there was tons left over – even after the parents had guzzled a great deal of it – and Lavender had had a go with her “sponge” bag.) After the ensuing balloon fight and Father (“Cappy”) Christmas there was a magician. He was extremely good, especially his levitation and card tricks – it was a very good party. After it we were going camping up the river with the Poole’s. We changed at their bungalow and reached the shack at about 9.0. there was a fire burning and we soon had some soup and hot stew inside us – but we only talked for a while as we were so sleepy. Soon we were asleep on our soft mattresses.

Sunday 21st December Up at 6.30 in the morning – it looked as if it would be a lovely day as soon as the mist cleared – and it was. We had a good breakfast but by the time we were going up river (Daddy, George P. and I went ahead in a dugout canoe) it was 8.45. It was lovely being poled and paddled up stream. The boat rocked from side to side – and seemed likely to tip over at any moment, but we seemed to be able to go up roaring rapids without being wetter. When we had gone a little way up (about 3 pools we started fishing the rapids. The pools were beautiful – deep and green with little beaches of pebbles or sand up to the jungle. There were supposed to be a herd of wild elephants, but all we saw were a swarm of



green parrots, cormorants, a dazzling flash of emerald blue (a blue kingfisher) a small grey heron (about one foot six inches), wagtails, divers and two baby turtles this was quite enough! Daddy and I fished nearly up to the mine<sup>157</sup> without a touch – though we fished some lovely rapids. The fish were – I think – in the deep pools – for the water was cold (at least by Indian standards) and it was only in the afternoon, when the water was warmer, that we saw any jump. A bit after lunch (which we had with the others further down) I caught the only fish of the day – a tiddler mahseer of just under half a lb on a silver ‘mep’ (aprox). Soon after that we came down stream – Daddy and I changed to a rubber dingy – terrific for rapids – we nearly went over in the last one. We arrived home late in the evening, only to find the cook on leave and the assistant cook drunk! Still we managed in the end. (How pampered can you get!)



Monday 22nd December We all have not done much except recuperate from our fishing trip and the party. I just sat around in a deckchair in the sun, and overhauled my fishing gear, and later occasionally played badminton. We have now three games, (almost ready to play!) tennis, ping-pong and badminton. It was very hot so we all did not do much, Anne did a little butterfly catching in the morning – but she was sick in the evening so went to bed early (probably too much sun).

Tuesday 23rd December Not such a nice day. The wind blowing fairly strongly at times so that it was difficult to play badminton. Annie is feeling better and she was very hungry, as she could not eat much. We have just started on our project to make some fish pools in the sunken garden. The cement has arrived but in the evening it grew cold so we did not bother to do it. At about 7.0 there was very heavy shower – in fact a downpour – for about 20 minutes – the heaviest rain yet – and it came through several holes in the roof! Tomorrow, if it is fine, we are going fishing up the Dikhu (Fiona and I).

Wednesday 24th December Fiona and I had a lovely day yesterday. We went to the basha (bungalow) and arrived at a bit after 9.15. We had, on the journey, picked up Puny and his son (we were being driven there in the humber (Priscilla)). We went up the river in the Co Flat-bottomed boat – with the wind against us. At first it was rather cloudy, and there were clouds dotted about in the valleys in the Naga hills – they seemed lost in those shark-fin ridges. On the way up we saw some scarlet and yellow humming-birds (high up in the vines hanging from a cliff) – a tribe of some fifty monkey feeding in some fields by the road. It was beautiful being oared gently up – we did not really fish till we reached the mine. After a few minutes I caught my one and only fish – a little one of about half a pound – 13 inches long – I think it was a snow trout – it was silver with black spots. We went a few pools further up – but without any success. Fiona had a bath in about 7 inches of water and then a sunbathe. Then we went down again and arrived down in about one and a quarter hours. On the way down we saw some lovely birds and also a wild boar which was grunting along the bank. After an incident packed drive back we reached home (i.e. Being stuck behind a lorry – broken down)

Thursday 25th December Christmas day! And what a day. We all got up at about 7.30 and had tea together – then we opened our presents. We all had some lovely presents – among mine the best were a Parker '51' (with which I am writing now) and a Leopard skin – to take home and say I shot. We then had breakfast – soon afterwards we had to go out and meet a deputation of schoolchildren who had come to sing, dance and hang garlands round our necks – actually they were quite sweet.









After lunch while the others rested I started making a tank and river – it is just a few pools & waterfalls made of concrete in which I am going to keep fish. At about 4.0 we went along to have tea at the Lumley Ellis (a sort of tennis and Christmas ‘do. We arrived and watched the tennis for a bit – not particularly high standard – then I played a game of football – after this (it was jolly exhausting – and I had to play in my socks – through the occasional patches of mud). Then we went along to the club to see a film. In the interval before the film all the children screamed around tearing down all the decorations etc – then played ‘tig’ – I quietly retreated via a ladder onto the roof! I had had enough excitement as I nearly killed or concussed Robert Lumley Ellis. The films were quite good – though rather bloodthirsty – the main feature being ‘The Indian Fighter’. We arrived back pretty late (off the L-E’s Christmas tree I got a dart-board).

Friday 26th December Boxing day. We went for a picnic today – the Shaws (Pam and Robert) at the Jhansi river (about 50 miles away). We had to start at about 10.30 and after a pretty bumpy drive we reached their place. It was a few tents in the middle of a marsh beside a muddy little stream (The Jhansi). All the people did all day was to drink around a table. They were there for about 10 days – some of them – ostensibly to shoot ducks – but this was only for the husbands – and even the ducks apparently had forsaken them and gone somewhere else. I went off and fished in a pukri with Duck’s guts – although I got hundreds of bites I only caught one little catfish. After a delicious and enormous curry Anne and I went off and caught little fish in a few muddy strips of water with a net. We left the men drinking and shooting (Daddy had just knocked off a bottle-top on the other bank – after the others had been trying for hours) – and Mummy nattering to Pim. We caught some little fish and then went home at about 4.45.





Planter's picnic by the Jhansi river

Saturday 27th December A glorious day. I am sitting here in a deckchair absolutely baking. Today we are staying at home but I personally have got plenty to do. In between practicing tennis and settling in my fish in their pools (most of them have died unfortunately) – I have got to write ‘thank you’ letters and get my fishing stuff ready for our trip up the dikhu tomorrow. Gosh what a day! (12 hrs later) And it certainly was a day and a half! I had so much sun, and tennis however that that as well as getting sunburnt I got a bilious attack. I felt ill in the evening and just before I went to bed I was sick.. I was sick 4 more times during the night at about hourly intervals until 3.15.

Sunday 28th December I woke up this morning feeling weak and stiff – so we did not start up the river until 9.45. We only had one boat (green) so we went just a short way up (the 3rd rapid from the basha). As I was feeling not too well I did not do much fishing – just in the ‘fast’ rapid – where I had two bites. Daddy fished down below and also had two bites. Fiona was feeling a bit ‘off-colour’ as well – feverish so she said – so we just lay about in the shade of some long grass and ate a delicious lunch of chicken curry and pineapple. Then at about 3.15 we came back – driving slowly past Daddy’s old gardens. When I had a look at my fishes I found that all of them have died (including the catfish) – except for two fish and a shrimp!

Monday 29th December I rested in the morning and only played one game of tennis. After lunch Mummy, Anne and I went into the club (Fiona (feeling ill) and Daddy (having to go to a meeting) came in at six.) We arrived at the club at about 3.30 when I played a set (singles) with Rory Ross (8-1 to him). Then I went off to watch Anne riding Bifty on the polo ground. Bifty was very reluctant to gallop except when heading back to his stables! When Anne had finished riding Bifty we went back to the club. I played two more sets of tennis (one with Lampit we won 6-4; and one with Leslie Woollet (v.g) we won 5-1) As it was beginning to

get dark we went in – and for about 40 minutes I had to try to amuse the ‘dear’ little children. I regained my shattered nerves under a cold shower and at about 6.45 (quarter hour late) the carol service began – it was quite good although the piano-played by Peggy Davis – was a bit wonky. Then came an interval and the film ‘Passage Home’ – the story of a captain (Peter Finch) remembering his first command in which among other things he was deprived of his girl friend (Diane Cilento) by his second lieutenant (Anthony Steele). After a cold supper we came home and in to bed at about 12.0

Tuesday 30th December All of us (except for Daddy) were going to have 11’ses at an Assamese house (friend of Mummy’s teacher) and then go on to Sibsager. However I decided to fish. Mummy and I arrived back from Communion at about 9.30 and from 10 onwards I was trying to get my fishing tackle ready – but owing to various snags it was not until 3.0 in the afternoon that I was down by the pukri with the rubber boat. I then blew it up and went fishing for an hour. Meanwhile Mummy had been with girls on their expedition. Apparently they had had lovely lunch at the Assamese house (at 11.0!) of curry etc which nearly made them all sick. They then went on to Sibsager where after a bit of a scrum they managed to get some bangles and a pair of shoes for Fiona (!). They came down to the pukri at about 4.15 and had some tea down there and I rowed in (not a bite). In the evening we had quite a “hot” skiffle session.

Wednesday 31st December Hogmany day. In the morning I went out with Daddy in the land rover – he let me drive it quite a bit and I am now beginning to get the knack, although some of the roads around the estate are quite complicated and tricky. At about 3 in the afternoon we drove to the Sonari club to watch the Polo. It was just a scratch polo competition which Cappie’s team won (Cappie, Ray Corps and Shortt<sup>158</sup> + 1). We then watched some tennis which was eventually won in a very good game by Margarite --- and Doctor Gray. Fiona wanted to stay to the dance afterwards so she went off to get dressed at Nita Rigby’s house. The dance started at 9 and Daddy went back there to see how she was getting on – not surprisingly as all of them were a great deal older than her she did not enjoy it very much and so they were back here by 11.15. I think Mummy was the only one to see the new year in (+ Fiona).

Thursday 1st January (1959) THE NEW YEAR – and may it be a happy one! In the morning in between preparing all sorts of games we watched a magician (so-called) who was actually a person who beat a drum while his little son did all sorts of trapeze tricks – such as walking across the rope on the tips of two horns to which his feet were strapped. In the afternoon I went for another drive with Daddy in the Land rover. I am beginning to get the knack but still have a lot to learn. Fiona then tried driving – she did not change gears but all the same she was doing quite well apart from one little fault – every few minutes she would start talking to Daddy or looking around and then she would forget about her steering. Several times she nearly went into the tea or over a bank. At about 3.30 the Highams arrived. We played games (tennis, badminton and croquet for a while (amidst great wrangling) and then came in and had tea. Paul then, after tea, bashed his head on the fence at the bottom of the garden. In the evening Viboo<sup>159</sup> and Bradley came up for drinks. We (the Highams and us) lit and sat around a camp fire by the tent for a bit. Then we came in and had a terrific skiffle session (with a few songs like ‘Old Macdonald’ thrown in) it was most enjoyable and very funny. At last they went at about 9.0 and we were in bed by 10.0.





Trapeze artist and drummer



Friday January 2nd Today we are going off to Kasiranga, so in the morning we are getting everything ready for the journey. We left at just after two hoping to get there in about 3 and a half hours however it was not until about 6.30 – 7 that we arrived. This was due to certain delays on the way. We stopped at about four and sat on a little hummock beside the road and had some tea (with crowds of admiring Indians watching) then we travelled on. The roads were rather bumpy and at last the result was that something was rattling in the engine so we had to stop and have a look. Enormous lorries were roaring past and as it was a narrow road and the light was going Mummy was a bit worried that we would be hit, but we managed to start off again in one piece after temporarily [sic] fixing on the air cleaner. Just as we got within the game reserve (it is an enormous reserve 30 x 200 miles in size with no boundaries to it (i.e. no fences etc) and with main roads villages etc running straight through it) – anyhow just as we were in it and night was falling something in the car started rattling – we all had visions of being stranded in rhino infested country for the night and being found corpses in the morning – however it did not seem to be an important part and at last we crept into the bungalow at 6.30 (having stopped to ask the way twice). Both the Edyes (with Anto) and the Merediths (with Babs) were there and we had quite a pleasant evening and then to bed ( was sharing a room with a Mr “Uppa Juppa” from Delhi.)

Saturday January 3rd Today was absolutely crowded [sic] out with events. I got up at about 6.0 (three quarters of an hour early) and at about 7.15 we set off to go to the elephants. We drove about 2 miles along a ‘bund’ road and then came to a little look out house and as we waited there out of the jungle appeared four elephants. Anne, Babs and Mrs Meredith got on the largest one ‘Sher Khan’ and Mummy Fiona and I got on the Tusker ( ) They were wonderful beasts (they could pick up things we dropped for instance Bab’s shoe) and had amazingly delicate feet – they picked their way through swamps and over banks without ever stumbling. Well we set off through the long grass. You can follow vaguely our path by the map below. Iiii denotes long elephant grass (up to 20 feet high which if you are in a dense clump of it (like on the lower side of the road) you cannot see out of it. Dots is just short grass from 1-6 ft high, dotted line is our route (on our elephant although together most of the time the elephants sometimes got dispersed).



Other dots denote that we chased an animal – for obvious reasons this is not accurate nor have I put in all the times when we did chase animals. Square is a house or farm (the amazing thing was that there were people living and working in their fields – with wild rhinos buffaloes etc roaming within sight). Circle with dots denotes a lake with water hyacinth growing over it. We almost had to swim over this one as it was about 10 feet deep. (one of the elephants with some indian guests on it would not cross the lake – so they had to go back another way). We spent about 3 hours on this and were travelling at about 3-4 m.p.h so we must have gone about 10 miles therefore the scale is about an inch to the mile. The crosses denote animals.

We thoroughly enjoyed it and I hope some of the photographs we took will come out. The elephants were very comfortable (as elephants go) with Dunlop cushions etc. We arrived back at the big bungalow at about 11.15 and as we had to have lunch at Johaut (2 hrs away) and had to have breakfast we had to rush. We had an enormous breakfast at 11.30 and owing to interruptions (such as the arrival of a baby deer which soon died) we did not get to the Brown's house till 2.20. We had a very nice by hurried lunch there in the middle of which Daddy arrived and we rushed off to Pim's. We spent a pleasant evening at Pim's (I found a banjilele which I strummed to myself (not nearly as nice as my guitar) while Fiona played Pat Boone records.) The grown-ups were having an apparently hilarious time up till 12.15 when the 'Great Li(o)ver (Charles Emmet) was seen off.







Sunday 4th January Up at the crack of dawn again. We were wakened by the persistent James and though we tried to shake him off it was without success. We had breakfast and then went up to a little....river high up on their tea estate. It was quite a nice little stream (about the size of a medium beck at home) with at first a sandy bottom and later a rock bed with deep pools and small rapids. I did not see any large fish only tiddlers but I expect there were some. I had a rather rough trip up and cut myself (it was my fault as I took off my gym shoes). We saw quite a few pud marks of tiger, leopard, sambur and barking deer. We slowly came down and after lunch, a rest and tea we set off only to rush back to fetch my sweater (which was in the car boot all the time). We arrived back at about 7-8 (I think).

Monday 5th January I don't seem to have done anything in the morning apart from trying to write this diary and helping Mummy to compile such lists as '2 sacks of potatoes – 3 morns [maunds] of rice – 1002 eggs etc. (for the Manas). After lunch I went for a drive with Daddy in the land rover, I have got it fairly straight now, apart from changing from 2-3 gears efficiently. Fiona always wants to have a drive, she is not too bad apart from the fact that she keeps looking at Daddy so that he will say she is driving well and consequently she would have been in several ditches if Daddy or I had not nudged her. She had to start up the junction of the 'Dhole Bagan' road with the main road and in the process nearly ran over three unsuspecting Indians and nearly went over a 10 ft bank – only Daddy pulled the wheel round just in time. At about 3.30 we went into the club to watch the Jorhort v Nazira polo match. As was expected Jorhort won easily enough 4-0 in three chukkas, although they did not play as well as they might have. I then played a bit of football, and we had the usual waiting etc before we got off at just after 8. We were all tired when we came back and were soon in bed.

Tuesday 6th January We had the usual scrum this morning. To begin with at about 10.30 Lumley came to inspect the garden. With him he brought Ralph and Robert who we had to entertain for about 2 hrs. We went around playing all sorts of games, Robert saying the whole time “oh what feeble bats .... Rackets ... balls .... Shuttle cocks (substitute appropriate one) – we have much better ones at home!” At last they went and we sank back and had some lunch. Poor Mummy almost immediately had to get up and entertain Babs and Daphne Meredith for the next few hours – and we were all quite relieved when everyone (including ‘Fi-fi’ their poodle (?) had gone). After lunch we had gone for a driving lesson – then gone for a walk (a short one) in the jungle. Fiona thought that she was being attacked by Nagas when she came on a harmless little man shooting birds.

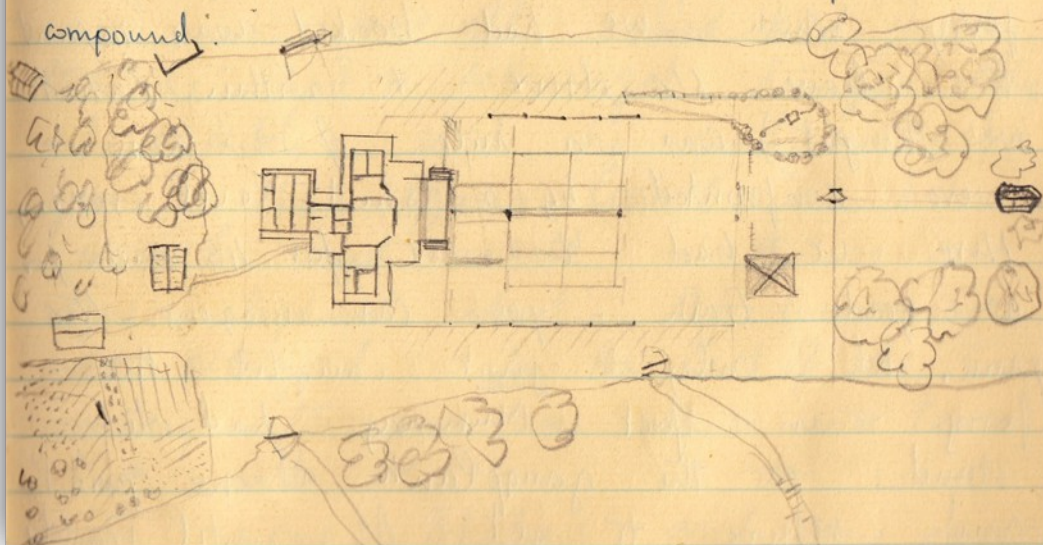
Wednesday 7th January A quiet day at last! We spent it in recuperating and beginning to get properly organised for our trip up the Manas tomorrow – we got about another 30 Macdonald spoons, and another rod and reel a few days later. [no picture] In the afternoon we went up to Cherideo Temple. It is built on a hill and is absolutely lovely. The path zigzags steeply up – obviously a stream bed in the rains and as one turns to rest a wonderful view opens out. The straight ‘Road of Sloths’ (a road which runs right across Assam) runs away from one, bordered on each side by a thin line of trees and the occasional hut. The eye can see for miles the flat rice field with the tanks (“Gut-washing) and the clumps of trees, when one actually gets to the temple you cannot see much as it has been overgrown again with a kind of bramble with little blue flowers. Just four stone pillars rear up out of the undergrowth and where the paths cut across it you can see the walls sticking up out of the earth. At one place some of Mummy’s effort have not been destroyed and you can see something like this. The altar (or at least what we think is the altar is slightly visible. It is just a square outline of stones but under it (we hope) is all the gold. Now I hand you over to Professor (hon) Macfarlane (Iris) better known to reading world as I.M. (see Assam Tribune vol....) on The Cherideo Temple. (its history, shape and (what else?) – GOLD!!)

[Iris's handwritten account] When a group of Tais from the Shan states wandered into the Brahmaputra Valley at the end of the C13, they had little thought of conquest. After thirteen years of moving from one waterlogged spot to another, they found themselves, almost unintentionally, masters of a large part of the valley, and settling around a temple dedicated to Vishnu (Sorai-Deo, the “Bird-God”) they called themselves Ahom, “the peerless” “the undefeated”. From this the valley took its name.

The Ahoms took over the Bird-god temple and placed their own god, Chum-deo, in it. According to their traditions this god had been brought down from heaven on a golden ladder, along with a sacred drum, a sword, and some chicken bones. The priests of Chum-deo fore-told the future by consulting these bones and the Cherideo temple became the centre of the first Ahom capital. Tanks were dug, palaces, fruit gardens & a large town spread round the temple, and as the years went by burial mounds multiplied, each royal body placed in a vault with provisions for the next life, and a slave with a lamp to attend him. The temple was visited at coronations and burials, and pilgrimages made to it to give thanks for victories or propitiate the gods in times of famine or disease. It was probably built to the same pattern as other Hindu temples, with one main chamber, & two smaller darkened rooms, the end one housing the god in his jewelled box. As the Ahoms became more Hindu-ised they grew decadent & inhibited and became a prey to wily Brahmin priests. Eventually the temple was sacked by Muslims in the C17 & according to some stories, the jewelled god of “the peerless” Ahoms was eventually sold in a Calcutta bazaar. The final depredations were committed by Assam Co. planters who used its bricks to build their first bungalows.

Thursday 8th January

Not much of sensational value today - but there is certainly plenty to do. Early this morning we went Moorghi (Jungli) hunting. Although Daddy had a shot at some they were too far off and he did not get them. The rest of today we have spent getting food, fishing tackle, clothes etc for the Manas. As we are going at 11.0 tonight we want to get everything loaded into the jeep before dark. Here below is a plan of the



Friday 9th January What a journey! We started off at 10.5 and drove and drove. After a while the driver began to get sleepy and started swerving all over the road (2 times Mummy had to grab the wheel!) - so we had to stop and get Daddy from the Jeep (borrowed) to drive us in the landmaster. At last - after several stops we arrived at the outskirts of Gauhati - with an hour before the ferry which we had booked was meant to leave. We drove to within (what we thought) was a mile of it - then we were confronted by a shut level crossing. Here we had to wait for 45 mins for a goods train - you can imagine the panic. We only just caught the ferry - in fact Mummy had to stand on the gangplank at one point and refuse to get off until Daddy got on - as they were taking them up. On the short journey across the Brahmaputra (15 minutes) saw some nice dhows (?) and quite a few porpoises. It was quite a pleasant drive on - though very bumpy in places. At last we arrived at the outskirts of the Game Reserve at



about 2.30 and had lunch. Just as we set off for the last ten miles on a kind of path through the jungle the Forest Officer as he waved us farewell told Daddy that he had better get his gun ready. When Daddy said he had not got a gun the officer looked a bit worried and said – “theres a rogue elephant about.” Of course we were petrified for the rest of the journey (Fiona was white with terror) but all we saw on the way were some Bhutans and some peacocks (2 – a peahen & a peacock). We arrived at last at about 4-ish and we started to unpack- but soon I rushed off and started fishing. However I did not catch anything that evening so I came in rather cold as the sun set. Apparently as I was fishing a herd of wild buffaloes had been grazing behind me – one of the most dangerous animals – they come out of the jungle and down to the water at the same place every evening. As you can imagine we were all glad to get into our beds.

Saturday 10th January There was a howling wind in the night and I woke up thinking “oh gosh the weather has turned nasty” but apparently it happens every night. All the doors and windows slammed all night until Daddy went to close them – and then of course – the usual story he forgot one and as he sank into bed it started crashing. We got up at about 7.30 and had an enormous breakfast and at about 9.30 we started off to fish with the rubber boat to fish down the river. Daddy Fiona and I fished all morning in some lovely pools and did not catch a thing, but it was great fun going down the rapids in the rubber boat. At about 1 o’clock Fiona disappeared [sic] and reappeared about half an hour later with a bent rod and a 3 and a half lb mahseer under her arm (the first of the day!) according to her own account she was fairly lucky – but it was a jolly good effort. At about 2.30 we arrived at Fulgari which is a famed pool. There we saw some jumping and Daddy hooked and landed a 6 and three quarter lb mahseer. Then I had four bites – one of them ran for about half a min before it jumped, then came off. Then I hooked and landed a little one of about two and a quarter lb. Then at 3.30 we had lunch. Though we fished for a bit we did not catch anything more after this and we drove back.

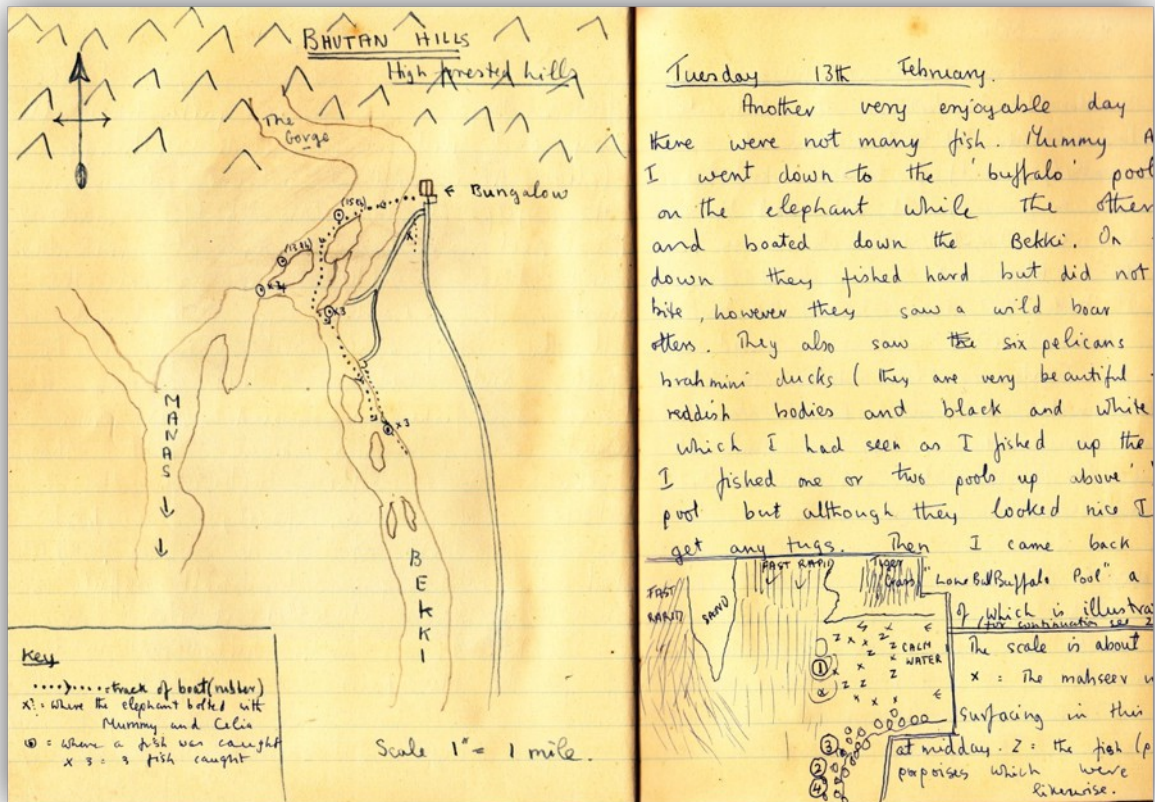
Sunday 11th January Yesterday at last I had success. I fished down a little tributary to Fulgari, and on the way I did not catch anything. The others (Tim, Celia, Fiona and Daddy) fished down the main stream of the Bekki. Almost immediately Tim calmly landed a 15 lb mahseer under the bungalow. A little later Celia after a good fight landed a 13 lb fish. Then Fiona caught a 2 and a half and three and a half lber at the same place that she caught the others. Daddy also caught a 2 and a half lber. When I arrived at Fulgari I met Mummy and Anne (they had come by elephant). They said that their ‘mahout’ had said that there was a much better pool right down the river – about a mile. So we three went down on the elephant – leaving a message for the others. When we arrived I could see it was a lovely pool, but my tackle got in such a mess that Mummy and Anne had to go back to meet the others at Fulgari before I had really started to fish. I fished down the side of one rapid and on a Macdonald I caught 2 fish, first 7 then 9 lbs and lost a third because my spoon broke. From the back of the elephant and actually fishing we saw 2 Brahmini ducks, 4 buffalo (they are enormous), 1 hog and 1 barker deer ( I think) and Mummy saw one doe sambur.



Alan with two mahseer with Manas river behind

Monday 12th January The fish were off the take again today. There was no wind last night (which is extremely unusual) so there was probably a change in the weather which affected the fish. Anyhow we fished quite hard all day and did not catch anything. Celia, Fiona and I drove down in the jeep to within half a mile of the pool which I was at yesterday and then walked down – while the rest came down in a boat fishing all the way. We had lunch at the pool and Celia, Anne, Daddy, Fiona and I fished on but apart from about 2 or 3 tugs no-one felt a thing, although in a little backwater the mahseer were showing freely – their backs coming right out of the water. Celia and I came upon a big bull buffalo on which we almost stumbled – it was having a wash. It slowly turned and made off for the other bank, then stopped turned and stared at us. We saw many marks of buffalo-tiger (we followed one thro’ the jungle) and many kinds of deer.

Tuesday 13th February Another very enjoyable day, although there were not many fish. Mummy Anne and I went down to the ‘buffalo’ pool again on the elephant while the others fished and boated down the Bekki. On the way down they fished hard but did not have a bite, however they saw a wild boar and some others. They also saw six pelicans and two brahmini ducks (they are very beautiful – golden reddish bodies and black and white wings) which I had seen as I fished up the stream. I fished one or two pools up above ‘buffalo’ pool but although they looked nice I did not get any tugs. Then I came back to the “Lone Bull Buffalo Pool” a small segment of which I caught my only fish just before lunch – as the others came sailing down in the rubber boat. At about 3 o’clock we started going back – completely unaware of the danger that lay ahead of us (at least ahead of Mummy and Celia). Mummy and Celia taking the rubber boat started off while the rest of us walked up to the jeep.



The scale is about 10 yds to an inch

x – the mahseer which were surfing in this calm water at midday

= the fish (perhaps baby porpoises which were doing likewise

Fishing Note

1 = Equals the place where I hooked 7lb fish on Sunday on a 2" Macdonald. It took about 8 minutes to land (on split cane 7 ft trout spinning rod and a borrowed multiplying reel) 2 – where I hooked a 9 lb fish, also on Sunday. It took about 12 mins to land but the tackle was the same as for 1. 4 = where I lost a third fish on Sunday (it broke the rear treble off the back of my 2" Macdonald.

3 = where I hooked my only fish on Tuesday a 9 and a half lb mahseer. (It took about 10 minutes to land – I was helped by Mummy and Anne – Mummy hopping around on the bank saying "let it go" "let it go" etc (usually when the fish wanted to come in!)

### Chart

Fish	Weight	Peculiarities	Length	Width	Date	Bait
Mahseer – thick lipped	2½	---	---		9.1.59	Mep
" "	7		28 ins	5 ins	10.1	2" M
Mahseer Golden	9		30 ins	5¾	10.1	2" M
Mahseer Golden	9½				12.1	2" M
crossed with porpoise?						



[Iris's handwriting] The mahout had not wanted to take the boat, but we foolishly pooh-poohed his fears so could only blame ourselves for the outcome. As we climbed the steep bank up to the road, the boat started to slip. This frightened the elephant who broke into a run, and the next thing we knew she was galloping over the road & down into the jungle the other side with us clinging head downwards to her sides, the blanket having slipped off her back & under her stomach. For what seemed like several hours, but could only have been a few seconds, I clung on. Then I had to let go, and fell backwards, expecting a large foot to finish me off. However I fell clear & got up to see Celia & the elephant crashing off into the undergrowth, missing tree trunks by inches. At last there was silence and I was very relieved to hear Celia's voice from a distant patch of grass – she followed shortly afterwards, white as a wall but quite cheerful. The mahout insisted that we get on again, which we bravely did, and tottered off the other end straight to the brandy flask. Strangely enough I hadn't a bruise or a scratch, but felt shaken for several hours. I tell the story to everyone I meet, but it doesn't seem to impress them, obviously I cannot communicate the terror I felt!

### Game and Animals Seen

#### 1 Big Game

20 Buffalo (a herd; some with young; a lone bull), 1 boar; and 3 baby pig.

#### 2 Small Game

1 Sambar (do), 2 barking deer (bigger and darker than hog), 15 hog deer, 3 otters

#### 3 Birds

12 Pelican, 2 Greater Hornbill, 2 Lesser Hornbill, Pallers Fishing Eagle, 2 Cormorants, 2 Brahmini duck, 2 Peacocks (1 male, 1 female), 20 Vultures, Flights of Goosanders (maganzas), Teal (Flights) and Mallard (Flights), Kingfishers

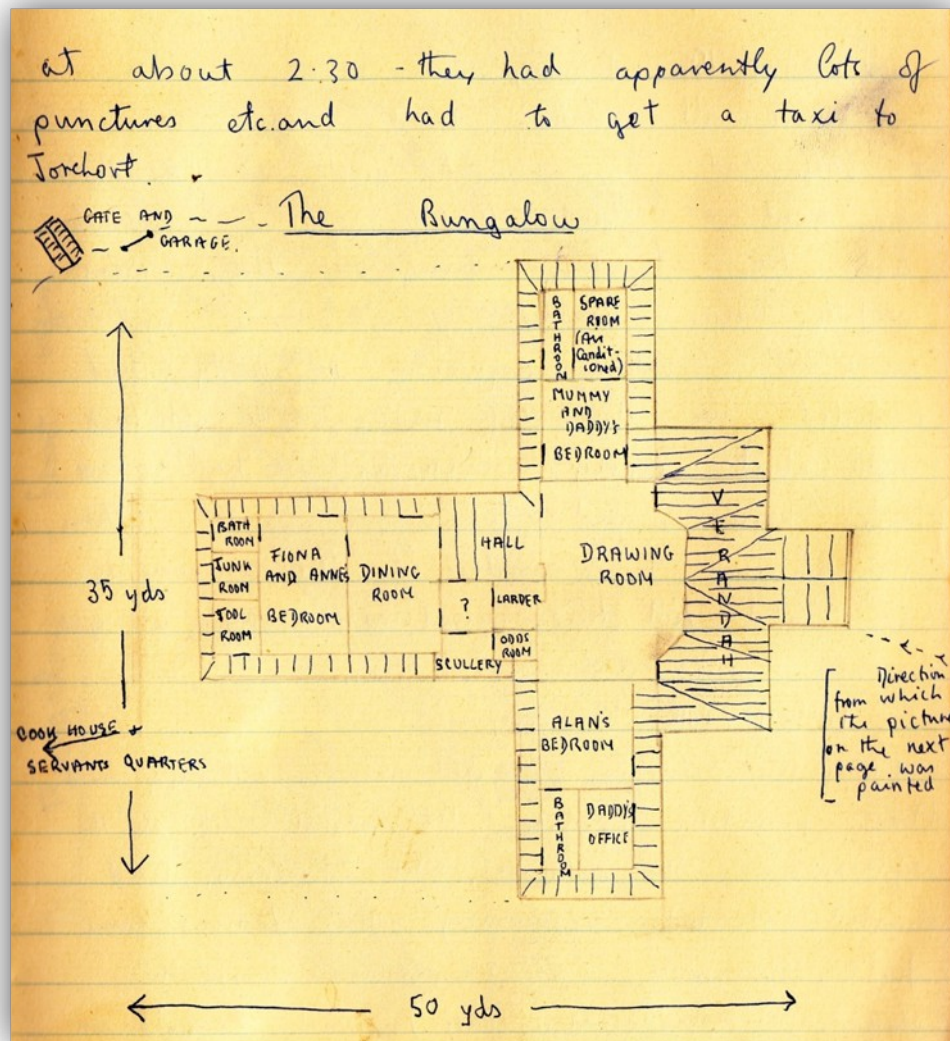
#### 4. Fish

Baby Porpoises, Mahseer Golden, Mahseer Thick Lipped



Tim Edye, Iris, Celia Edye, Fiona, Anne, Alan by the Manas

Wednesday 14th February [sic - January] A long and tiring journey back. Starting from the bungalow at about 8 o'clock we started off well by getting a puncture after about an hour and a half, and as we had stopped to see a baby elephant which Lal Piari (The Forest Commission (at the Manas Reserve) elephant) had captured and which was being trained there. We just managed to catch the ferry to Gauhati and had lunch at the 'Gate to Shillong' in the hills with the Edyes (they had missed their ferry). We drove on and on – at one place we took the wrong road and the jeep overtook us and as we did not have any puncture kit we had to be ahead of them. At last after racing along we found the jeep (the driver was having a cup of tea). We drove on to Jorhort then found the jeep had got held up after a wait we got home very worried at about 10. We had no sheets or blankets – however the jeep arrived .....



Thursday 15th January We were all rather tired today, nevertheless we still had to go out and see the Rigby's<sup>160</sup>. We went at about 11.30 and had lunch and tea at their bungalow. They were awfully nice really, though Gophie and Nita are both rather loquacious. As Daddy had predicted we did not manage to get back until about nearly seven as we had to see their horses and then we started talking scandal, or the swindles of the company so we could not tear ourselves away. We got back tired and were soon in bed.



Friday 16th January In the morning I did some sketching and the painting. At about 6.0 in the afternoon the guests – the Lobens<sup>161</sup> came first, Margarite (who we saw winning the doubles tennis at Sonari) and Dougall an awfully nice Scottish couple. They had come to see a ciné film of their children. We saw this film through twice with one of ours when Rory (spelt wrong) and Betty Ross arrived. They had just come to be sociable, and we had only just let them in when Limpit<sup>162</sup> arrived. He had come to show us some still photos he had taken at home of Scotland etc. We saw some films and slides then had a sort of ‘snack’ dinner – soup, baked beans on toast etc. Then at about 10.0 they were about to set off when unfortunately (?) I brought out my guitar and we had a ‘hot’ skiffle session until 12.0. Rory was extremely funny, and Limpit was good on the double base. I staggered into bed at 12.45!



Saturday 17th January Thank goodness we at last had a quiet and peaceful day. I spent most of it sitting drawing in the garden however in the evening we decided we would have our long prepared camp fire down by the tent. With an impossible amount of trouble we succeeded in getting wood, nuts, guitars, cushions, torches collected together and we had lighted the fire and were getting gulps of smoke when guess what happened! A storm. We saw enormous sheets of lightning quite close and the thunder crashed around us. As we were under some big trees we decided that we had better move and just as the first sheet of rain came lashing down we scurried back into the house – about half an hour after we had left it –



and we just met Daddy preparing to come out – he had been talking to some educational pundit (?). However we played cards and ate up the revolting looking (in lamplight lovely) fried bread and nuts.

Sunday 18th January We had quite an excursion today. We started by going to the Ross's for lunch. Betty and Rory were awfully nice but they kept us waiting for rather a long time – then after lunch (which ended at about 3) Betty cut the girls hair so it was not until after four that we set off for our next port of call the Edyes. There we had a hasty tea, looked at the chickens (they asked us to tell Granny to tell some farmer in Kirby Lonsdale that the eggs he sent out were very good except for the fact that there were only about 7 out of 24 hens). Mummy, Tim and the girls went to see a certain 'Dr Normans'<sup>163</sup> butterflies. They were (apparently) a wonderful collection and it was only by a bit of luck that we managed to get Mummy to the film in time. As I write this I am sitting back in a deck chair and only about ten feet away a little sunbird is hovering about some lovely red flowers. It looks just like a humming bird – is about 3 inches long with a long thin beak with which I suppose it sucks the pollen out of the flowers. Anyhow as I was saying we went to the film. It was extremely good "The Battle of the River Plate" except that some of the acting was not awfully good. We met quite a few people we knew at Selleng – the Merediths "Peter" (Seymour?)<sup>164</sup> Anne's godfather and some of Daddy and Mummy's friends.



Iris, Fiona, Anne on Bifty, and Alan on our last day

Monday 19th January Our last day at Cherideo – for ever? I am sitting here alone in the bungalow with the sun slowly sinking away out of the blue sky. We were all up late (except Daddy) as we did not get to sleep last night until about 1.30. This morning seemed to whizz by without much having been done, except a bit of sorting out of clothes, fishing tackle etc. This afternoon after finishing off ciné and other films (of Bifty, or rather Anne, playing polo with a golf club and tennis ball) then we went down to have a look at a new burial mount which has just been discovered. At first we went to the wrong place, a pukri which was being made larger, we were soon shown round a ‘sandalwood scent’ factory by an old gent with grey beard who told us that he sold this stuff for an amazing amount. (But when we got back Daddy said he was absolutely mad). Then we went on to the proper place, it was evidently at least an old house as there was a sort of mound and where the path leading through the mound (the mound was covered in scrub) you could see stones or rather bricks sticking out. In the middle of the mound which I suppose was about 20x15 yards (mostly covered with bushes) there was a huge slab of rock about 10 ft wide by 15 ft long by 12” thick, it was lying on the ground with weeds growing round it and one could see that there was a cavity underneath it, but it was probably infested by snakes. According to the electric ‘mistri’ (workman) with us someone had already found some coins but some other people had not been able to lift the block of stone with ten elephants. According to the legend the last king of the Ahoms (about 1750) had hidden all his vast treasure in this temple (?) and in a little pond nearby (40 x 20 yards) which was now dried up. The villagers who had collected by this time said that they had seen the treasure in the mud in the middle (in a box) but as there was an evil hoodoo on it (anyone who took would shed blood for it) they would not touch either of the treasure troves. Mummy hopes Daddy will let her look for it – even if she can’t have the treasure. Oh for a geiger counter!



Cherideo tea factory

I drove back through the lines in the Landrover and now the others have gone to Nazira to buy some stuff. In the evening we decided to complete our camp fire. This time the weather did not let us down and we had a lovely fire under the stars. We cooked all our food and then sat around singing to the guitar as the embers of the fire slowly glowed to blackness. Of course Fiona had to add her own personal touch by going and getting something out of the fire into her eye!



Tuesday 20th January Fiona's eye was rather inflamed today, so in between the packing etc people have been poking their fingers into it to see if they can find anything wrong with it. We packed and had our last view of Cherideo at about 11.0 when we said goodbye to Daddy. Then we drove slowly to Jorehort and having bought a few Manipuri table cloths etc we went to the airport. As usual the plane was about one and a half hours late and so we had a very leisurely picnic with Mummy in the long grass by the airodrome. At last the time for leaving arrived. Daphne Meredith (seeing off Babs) had been sobbing for about half an hour and then as we actually left Mummy both Anne and Fiona burst into weeping, but they soon recovered. We had quite a good trip down and arrived at about 7.30 at Calcutta (standard time). We had come without incident via the usual airodromes Tezpur and Gauhati. After struggling to get a taxi we arrived at the 'Grand' at about 10.30 (garden time). We then had dinner, to the accompaniment of some horrible songster, and then we returned, to climb into bed at about 12.5 (garden time). Blue (grass) bell girls are still here!

Wednesday 21st January We arose (surprised?) at 8.30 and after breakfast with the Merediths traipsed around Calcutta shopping. We were pretty successful and by lunch had everything we wanted. (I got for myself a splendid knife). We had to be at Air India at 3.30 and from there we went to the airport. In some ways it was a very sad drive, not only because it was our last glimpses of India but also because of the terrible glimpses it afforded of the poverty of Calcutta. The thing which immediately strikes you about the hoards of people who

crowd the streets is that most of them have nothing to do. They all sit around with nothing to do, but the fact that if you stop in a car dozens of them appear to help carry your hand-baggage shows that they are prepared to work. Even if there is something to do you usually see about three people pushing a cart with only a coil of rope on it! How they earn their keep I just don't know! The filth and crowding is awful and of course beggars and the halt, blind or lame are numerous. The plane was late I think, anyhow we seemed to have to wait an awfully long time. During this time Fiona kept nagging me to tidy up my mac – this would have meant that I had to disclose the books which I had hidden in it as I thought we were going to be overweight. I don't know how we were not (if we were not!) We flew off at about 6 and have stopped at Bombay (at about 10). There I met an awfully nice Dutchman who is just coming back from Indonesia. He was awfully funny (unintentionally) as he kept cursing A.I, for not telling him to change planes (actually they had – but he could not understand English very well)

Thursday 22nd January A very long hop from Bombay to Cairo (10 and a quarter hours) but owing to losing time we only arrived at 6.45 in the morning. Babs, Anne and Fiona were sitting in the row behind me and I was sitting next to two girls from Bombay. They must have been quite rich as in this holiday they had gone from Bombay to N. India to Towkyo (1 week) to Hongkong (1 week) and were going to London (1 week) thence to Paris (3 days) and finishing up by going via Rome (3 days) back to Bombay! Cairo was fairly cool, when we arrived for breakfast, and the breakfast was not awfully good. At the moment we (I think I saw Suez?) are flying over the mediterranean. Underneath us there is a thin layer of cotton wool (flat) cloud. Through this cloud in odd patches appears the blue sea. Just now we had a lovely view of Crete. It was long and chain-like for the most part, steep grey rock rising up sharply from the embosoming sea. The highest ridges of the furrowed rocks were snowcapped, while the gouged out valleys little groups of houses were just visible. We are now climbing up through a mist and the sea is invisible. We are flying over the alps and oh! What a wonderful, amazing sight! The sun is pouring down on the snowbound peaks which glare out of the clouds. The cloud thickly eddies round the base of the mountains. They stick out like sharks fins, white as icing sugar, almost blinding in their intensity – it is impossible to describe the grandeur and magnificence of these massive rocky crags. We have just passed Mont Blanc (the highest mountain in Europe) our wing tip could not have been further than 200 yds from the top of it. Now it looks as if this is lake Geneva ahead of us (it is 12.5 G.M.T.) We came on in fine weather with some lovely views of Germany to Dusseldorf at about 3.0. Then over the channel and we approached England again. As we came over London we hit thick fog and a lot of air pockets – we felt pretty sick. Still we were about one and a half hours early which was a good effort. Robert met us at the B.O.A.C terminal and we went back and spent a very pleasant evening with him and Angela in their flat.

Friday 23rd January We had breakfast at about 8 in sunshine (or nearly) that was pouring down on London. Then, struggling along with our heavy suitcase (roped up) we arrived at Euston at 9.0 and were off on the 9.30.

### Statistics

#### 1 The tea garden

Amount of people 3,000

Amount of workers. 1,000

Acres under tea. 1,056

Total acreage. 3,200

Pay of each person, 11rs 10an = 17/- per week

How many feast days, 3 paid holiday + paid holiday Republic & Independence (& lots of little ones - no pay)

Stages in tea:- From seed (in nurseries 8" apart) a yr or 2 old plant out into fields – hedge planting 2½ feet apart, 5ft tall also put in shade + greenrop (for quick temporary shade) also nitrogen into soil. After 4 yrs a slight return, after 7 or 8 yrs all your money back. (Pruned in cold weather to make into bush not tea.) Pluck from April to November – each bush plucked once every 7 days. (shoots 3-ins) 1130 lbs of made tea per acre (2,270 bushes per acre), (Manuring, infilling (bushes that have died) spraying (for red spider, black root rot etc) Plucked, weighed at factory, put onto withering racks – spread to weather (reduce water content by about 25%) (10 hrs) then swept up brought into the rolling room – rolled to crush all the cells then put through C.T.C (cut, tear, crush) to make it fine – then fermenting room (goes in green and in 1½ hours it comes out copper). Then fired at high temperature in firing machines 220° of their going in, 125° when it comes out.

Then into the sorting room – graded by machines (sieves) Main grade P.F. / Peco Fannings. B.P (Broken Peco B.P (i) [U.K.] (about 65% of crop)

Dust = 18% of crop.

Residue Grades – sent to Calcutta for internal consumption.

Packed into chests (roughly 12 lb tea in chest)

U.K. stuff – rail to near Gauhati boat down to Calcutta. Warehouses. Agents arrange sales in Cal & sent to London. London brokers – sale at London, Typhoo, Brook Bond.

## 2 The Bungalow

The nos of servants - 13

What they are 3 bearers, cook, 2 paniwallas, 4 malis (gardener), 1 sweeper, 2 horse folk, 1 driver, 2 cow men

## 3 The Burra Bungalow

Nos of Servants 24

What they are.

3 bearers, 2 paniwallas, 2 sweepers, 1 cook, 2 drivers, 2 watchmen, 8 gardeners, 2 horsemen, 2 cowmen

Rooms? 17 - 5 bathrooms: 1 billiard, 3 odd rooms, 2 dressing rooms, 4 bedrooms: 1 office, kitchen, 1 sitting, 1 dining

## 4 Assam

Other industries. Jute, Rice, Coffee, Oil (2nd), Paper, Coal

Under Tea 387,000

## 5 The T. Company

What gardens? 9 gardens

Size of total – 30,000

Total Workers 10,000 Total 27,000

Size of amount under tea. 13,000

## 1959

Iris to Alan, Saturday 24th Jan 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I can't believe it's only 4 days since you left, it seems 4 years and as it has rained solidly every day you can imagine how near I have come to throwing myself in the stomach-washing pookrie! Daddy and I have been saying at each other at intervals "Now they'll be in Geneva" or "Now they'll be on the way to Field Head" but you were probably clicking your heels in Cairo if the truth were known. I do hope not, and that all the arrangements went off successfully.*

*I haven't done much since you left except moon around, tidying and finding bits and pieces of your belongings. Found 2 photographs which I'll send in my next. I've started my spring-clean and repainting the girls room while vast great cupboards are installed in ours. I've also been gardening rather gloomily, and started my Assamese lessons again, and I suppose I shall pick up the threads again gradually. Daddy has given up drinking and smoking and is very smug about it! I wonder how long it'll last!*

*Do hope you aren't having to work too hard or run that beastly 10 mile, try and put it off till next year if you can. I'll write to Mr Marriot shortly about your future. It was wonderful having you, I hope you enjoyed it as much as we did. Will send the photos later. Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Tuesday 10th Feb 1959 Cherideo

*Cook hysterically pleased with your note*

*My dear Ulan,*

*Thanks for all your litters, I am staring this two days before I intend to send it so it will be a sort of diary won't it? (Have got Pam coming to stay at the week end so am starting to think like a bad typewriter).<sup>165</sup> I'm sitting by the fire with the room full of Vibhu's<sup>166</sup> sweet peas, gorgeous smell, he is still on his honeymoon but I hope will extend it so that I can have plenty of flowers while they're at their best. My own are still not doing anything except the ones at back which are all a hideous shade of purple, Madly disappointing.*

*We should be having a very gay whirl this week as its race week in Jorhat and we've had invitations to cocktail parties every day and a couple of lunches too - but needless to say we're not going to any of them. Daddy isn't keen and I'm not wild about the thought of appearing at party after party in the same crushed cotton frock. The only reason I'd like to go is to hear and perhaps even see some of the Jorhat scandal, Nazira never has any, but perhaps Pim will be able to tell me the best of it.*

*Yesterday Nazira beat Jorhat in the first round of the Roberts Cup (the little man we have one of). Great gnashing of teeth by Gussel Brown and Co.<sup>167</sup> I believe, and I should think Jocelyn<sup>168</sup> would get the sack as he was one of the goal umpires and said that it was not a goal when everyone else thought it was - and so gave the match to his father's team (Goffy was playing for Nazira) if you follow. As his manager was in the losing team he couldn't have been more tactless, am awaiting further information and will pass it on in due course!*

*We were going up to watch the match but woke up to heavy rain and as the car was making grinding noises Daddy combined the two and decided it was out of the question. Instead we went in to the club in the evening and saw "The Belles of St Trinians" which we saw ages ago in Windermere, quite funny but just missed the boat. Rory Ross has gone*



teetotal too and he and Daddy sit side by side sunk in a mournful silence, Betty whisked him straight home afterwards but Daddy I'm afraid gave in and had a couple of drinks. Lots of people there, including the Merediths who seem to have cheered up, the Edyes, Sehmers, Darby's, Cappie and co. No gossip though, Celia produced wads of money and stuffed them into my purse which was rather embarrassing - for the Manas. She said she didn't think we'd asked enough, which was a relief as she had taken so long to produce it I thought she was probably brooding furiously on us overcharging her.

Sunday morning was a service, Daddy and I took the dogs for a walk first and regretfully decided that we were'nt going to find anything in the burial mound. People have been seeing (?) golden lights shining out of it at night and having bad dreams about it and obviously weren't very keen on us going on. Anyway the hole must be about thirty feet deep now and there is no sign of anything. A pity. The padre bought his wife and daughter with him this time, she is a pretty girl of nineteen and will be a great asset in drawing people to the services I'm sure. He didn't give a very good sermon, rather vague and dreamy and never came to the point, Lumley was there and in a perfect tizzy about a couple of Finns who were coming to lunch, why or where they had sprung from, we couldnt quite gather, I don't think he knew either. When we left the club at 1.30 cars were hurtling in all directions but still no Finns.

There has been a big educational rally on in Nazira this week so perhaps they were coming to see that. Lavender and I went in on Saturday morning to see the exhibition but it was the same clay cockroaches and boiled silkworm cocoons as I'd seen at Dibrugarh the week before. Lavender bought a pear tree and I collected some more baskets, one a bamboo square which I thought could be made into a tray but discovered was far too big, one bottle of water perched on it made it completely unmanageable. Shall have to find something else to do with it. A couple of lorries took the Cherideo children in to see it, they were bored with the exhibition but adored the drive and shrieked and leapt about in the most alarming way. Daddy went in on Friday afternoon to a meeting to welcome the education minister, I was going, but we decided there wouldn't be any other women, as it turned out Alice, Peggy, Rosemary and Jean Higham were all there. It was the usual orgy of speeches and everyone nearly falling off the platform with boredom.

The rest of my time has been spent in making bedcovers, thank heavens they are now complete though a little peculiar, very wavy at the edges. I went over to Lavenders one morning to machine them, she was having a bilious attack when I arrived (must have been raiding the sponge bag) but recovered very quickly and sat nattering beside me all morning which probably accounts for the waviness. It's Timmy's [Corps] birthday to-day, I sent him some sweets, poor Timmy I don't suppose it was any different to any other day.

I have spent a housewifely day moving all our stuff back into our bedroom, cleaning out drawers and washing old gloves and scarves I found lurking in the backs of them. The cook brought his wife and children over this afternoon, two nice little boys and a baby girl, they all looked so cold and had runny noses and hardly any blankets, I shall never be able to sack him. Goodness knows where they will all sleep, on top of the stove probably. Daddy has just called for dinner but I wonder if he's had time to cook it.

I have missed a day because yesterday I wasn't too well. Lavender came over in the morning to collect the machine and eat a whole plateful of flapjacks biscuits with her coffee, I had awful pains in my tummy and sipped warm milk and listened to her chewing, and as soon as she had gone went to bed. I slept and slept all afternoon and woke at five to find a whole lot of my Assamese friends on the doorstep. They had come about cleaning the burial mounds for some festival and we all drank tea and talked and they went away quite happy though nothing seems to have been decided. I was feeling a little better and was much cheered when our first colour film arrived and we had a show after our baths. It is very good,

*every one has come out and most of them are excellent. They are mostly of us all in front of the dahlias, the Assamese children on Xmas day, the picnic with the Shaws and odd ones of fishes in bathing dresses and so on. I think I'll ask Peggy Davies to take them home when she goes in march. I hope the one you took has been sent to be developed, with Granny going to hospital perhaps it got forgotten, but it should be done as soon as possible. I'll write about it. Wish I could see it. The other photos have also come out but the silly asses have mucked up the one of the rhino looking at the elephant, but cutting out the elephant.*

*So sorry to hear about the 'flu, all the good effects of sunshine cancelled out I fear. We heard on the wireless it was rife at home. Do hope you got your skating eventually.*

*Yes, we'll forward the extra money you need for the guitar, let us know when. If you want to go to camp at Easter will you let Richard know, I don't like to bother Granny at this stage. Depends on that £12 a week job I suppose! If you can't get a job I'll ask Celia about the jam factory! We thought in the summer you might take your bike up by train to Glasgow or Edinburgh and from there tour round likely fishing spots for next summer - Sutherland particularly. That is unless you can get abroad.*

*Have just finished the book you gave me "India of the Princes"<sup>169</sup> - very interesting though she must be eating some of her words now! Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, c.17th Feb 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*A very busy week, so my diary has been neglected. I am still sitting in front of the fire, in fact we were just thinking this morning that the weather has been dismal ever since you left, and being thankful that it wasn't like this when you were here. On Tuesday night we had a terrific storm with hailstones the size of large marbles which bounced off the roof and piled up in the drains a foot deep Daddy was depressed at the thought of his young tea and I was grieving for my strawberries and peas, but actually it didn't do as much damage as we feared. My cabbages looked as if they had been peppered with machine gun fire but the peas stood up to it very well.*

*As you know we had the Shaws for the week end and Pam and I giggled ceaselessly, mostly taking off Lumley and the way he can never remember whether it was -Tuesday or Friday or 1943. They arrived on Saturday evening and came to tennis and afterwards we went up to the bungalow and had 3 drinks with the L-E's where Pim and I avoided each other's eyes while Lumley tried to remember who he had met, in what year, and what whoever it was had said, about which!*

*On Sunday we were supposed to be taking our curry up the river but it was raining off and on so we ate it at home instead and went to the river afterwards. We only boated up as far as the first rapid, where Pim and I stretched ourselves on the stones and snoozed while the men, Daddy, Robert and James fished. The river was very dirty and swollen after all the rain and they none of them got a bite, and we were relieved when we met the Lumley Ellisses, Tom Poole and a director who is staying with them and found that the four of them had been thrashing the river for seven hours also without a bite. The minute we met them Lumley started trying remember whether it was 1947 or 1948 that he'd caught a fish on the second rapid, or was it the third when he'd been fishing with old Macintosh, or was it Macintyre - Pim and I could hardly contain ourselves. We only stayed on the river an hour before a huge threatening cloud started massing and we hurried home, a pity but I don't think there was the remotest chance of us catching anything.*

*In the morning when we were out for a walk James was playing with Candy in a slightly teasing sort of way when she turned on him and bit him through the hand. I was horrified, and shall have to keep her away from children in future. They brought Bella with them,*

*Dinah was stand offish at first but they began to play with each other just before the Shaws left. The poor dears must have been glad to get home as the first night they were with us we had two earthquakes, and the second night a wild cat came up and fought with Boots round and round the bungalow till night. Pim says she will take Juno for the summer so I've written to Granny about it and I only hope that Juno hasn't already gone to another home. I can collect her when I come home and will bring her out with us next year. I quite see how Granny feels about her, if she is there for the holidays you must take it in turns to exercise her, though as I pointed out to Granny there is no need for her to go for enormous walks at her age and a run in the fields is quite enough. I was glad to hear from Granny yesterday that she is about to leave hospital, it sounds the most awful operation but if her indigestion has gone she will think it worth it .*

*We weakened and went up to Jorhat for the final of the Roberts Cup polo match on Friday, only because Nazira was playing and actually they won it 1-0. It was Cappie, Tom Darby, Goffy and Peter Short (from Sonari) and not a good match at all, in fact everyone said Moran should have won, Cappie and Short played very well, Goffy so-so, and Tom was quite hopeless, the only time he hit the ball at all it was a foul and the other side got a free shot.*

*After the match I went round the various stalls with the Merediths (and Fi Fi) all the big firms and Air Lines were exhibiting things and each one we visited offered us a drink so we finally tottered away feeling very warm and happy. Daphne of course was buying quantities of expensive scents and materials in between. After that there was a cocktail party given by I.C.I., I had taken my little black home-made dress but the wrong petticoat so had to pin everything out of sight and walk round bent double all evening, every time I forgot and straitened up there was a fearful rending noise. The cocktail party consisted of standing in a smoky room screaming at the same people one meets every week at the club, my feet swelled and my eyes ran, and then we all went downstairs and dragged our swollen feet round the dance floor. We had come in Tom Poole's car and we finally persuaded him to go home. Daddy got in one side of the car and fell straight out of the other as the driver had opened the door – it was like something out of a Danny Kaye film and I laughed till I was sick but he didn't think it was particularly funny!*

*Yesterday I had rather an awful day as Lumley and Mr Houldey,<sup>170</sup> the director, came to lunch and we went to dinner with Tom Poole, Lumley and Mr Houldey! As you can imagine my conversation had dried up completely by eight p.m. and I started saying the most ridiculous things and covering Daddy with shame.*

*Leslie Sawtell<sup>171</sup> has been sitting having coffee half the morning and now its after 12 & Daddy & the dakwalla [postman] pacing up and down, panther-like.*

*Glad you're better but sad about the skating. It still sounds pretty miserable at home, maybe you'll get some more. Couldn't you sell your Air Gun to help towards a new guitar if you can't manage to sell the old one at a good price?*

*Must fly –  
Much love , Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, c.23 Feb 1959 Cherideo<sup>172</sup>*

*My dear Alan,*

*Monday morning and all the servants either on leave or clutching boils on their legs and saying they must go on leave. Never mind, life is really much simpler without them. This wet weather is hard on the coolies as they never seem to have any warm clothes, the cook's three children have all got streaming cold but I never hear them cry, they don't have anything to do or play with but are a happy little lot. His wife has been in hospital for the last three days*

*and the doctor babu thinks she may have T.B. which is rather worrying as I suppose I'd have to sack him if she has poor little man. What a depressing country this is sometimes.*

*We had to put off our river trip again yesterday as it was wet and cold, spent a quiet day at home going for walks, sleeping and doing the crossword. The Corps started off for the river but there was so much water on the roads that they kept getting it into their petrol tank and finally had to be towed into Lakmijan – just in time to cadge a large lunch off the Barry's<sup>173</sup> of course!*

*The evening before, Saturday, there was a drinks party at the B.B.<sup>174</sup> given by Mr Houldey the director who is out here. We all had to stand about on the verandah which was freezing cold but everyone was determined to drink as much as they could in the shortest possible time so the party soon warmed up. The whole Assam Co was there, sixty of us<sup>175</sup>, and I shouldn't think there was much left of the Lumley Ellises lovely new red carpet by the time we had finished grinding cigarette ash and potato chips into it. I thought there would be some proper eats but only a few nuts and chips were provided, I stationed myself beside them and managed to eat quite a lot but Daddy didn't get a bite and no dinner either. I wore my little black dress as did every other woman in the room except Molly Martin<sup>176</sup> who had on the most extraordinary beige wool frock sagging at the seams and with celluloid grapes in wobbly bunches at the neck. No scandal to report, there never is in Nazira which is just as well.*

*The evening before, Friday, we went to dinner with the Lobbans, arrived to find them out so thought we had come the wrong evening and were just about to go home when we glanced through and saw that the table was set for four and the bearer said yes, we were expected but that the sahib and memsahib had gone out. We thought it a bit odd but after fifteen minutes they arrived breathless, having gone out to meet us as they'd heard a bridge was down, we'd actually passed them on the road. We had a nice cosy evening just chatting by fire..*

*I was going to start going down to the school this a.m. to teach them English and try and learn Assamese, but my master has just been moved to the big school (the other master went mad) so I thought I'd give him a chance to settle down. I've just had a note from him asking me when I'm coming but I've got nothing ready. I'm dreading it actually, but feel its the only way to learn, my Assamese will reduce them all to hysterics I feel sure. I've decided to write a children's book this hot weather, bringing in the Assamese fairy stories I am translating. Something like "The Meeting Pool" but I thought I would make it the life of some children on a tea garden with the stories told to them by their ayah. Can't quite get the plot straight in my mind but the stories are nearly all ready. The awful part of it is typing it all out, it gives me shooting pains down my back just thinking about it.<sup>177</sup>*

*The sun at last, and I must go and see if there are any mulberries ready. The plum tree is a mass of blossom and the big bed in the corner looking quite nice. The lawn is a mess, Bifty's fault, when we let him out after lunch he capers about like a two year old leaving enormous holes in his wake, but I haven't the heart to stop him as he enjoys it so much. A horrid thing happened to two of the horses coming back from Jorhat, the driver of the lorry they were in braked suddenly and they fell cut, one broke its leg and the other hurt itself quite badly too. Some of these men out here madden me the way they expect their horses to give them polo all over the countryside but never bother to see the horses themselves are looked after. Cappie is off to Calcutta in a week or two to try and collect some more polo ponies, I don't know how these people afford it!*

*Must stop and write a letter to Pim who is sending me her machine to borrow while she's home, I'll make myself a couple of blouses to replace the ones the Fish [Fiona] removed!*

*I have just got your letter [dated 16th February] with the enclosed cutting about the Nagas, really I do think these English newspapers are completely irresponsible publishing stuff like*

*that. It's men like Mr Flipping Wise who have spoilt it for the rest of us and we shall never be able to put a foot inside the Naga hills again.<sup>178</sup> Actually a certain amount of what he says is true, the "failed B.A.'s" bit and the fact that the men sent to the Naga hills after partition being completely unsuitable, on the other hand he has made no attempt to find out the other side and the 35,000 dead must be complete guesswork. He stayed with Gussel Brown for a fortnight apparently, but Gussel had no idea what he was up to, in fact there is a lot of doubt as to whether he went in to the Naga hills at all, probably got his facts from a tiddly planter in Sonari P.O! I don't know whether it has anything to do with it, but there have been two quite nasty raids by Nagas recently, Tim Edye was telling me about it at the club last night, several people killed on both gardens. A pity, the whole thing is rather a miniature Cyprus, bungling and mismanagement but with the Indian government as the culprit this time.*

*Was delighted to hear about your letter from Lord Tweedsmuir, definitely a Good Contact though you mustn't overdo it! I think the article to the Field would be worth trying, write it as a schoolboy to make it more original "Mahseer Fishing in Bhutan for the Christmas Hols" or something of that kind. Unfortunately my pictures of Kaziranga and the Manas were in colour, I don't know if any of yours came out or not. The Field doesn't print colour photos, and I don't suppose they would want the professional ones taken by E.P. Gee,<sup>179</sup> the whole point would be that you took them yourself. I think the one of the rhino staring at the elephant might be good enough, and the one of your tackle laid out on the grass, and then if you could get one of "the day's catch" that would probably do. Didn't we send you some strings of mahseer from our first Manas trip? You mustn't be disappointed if they don't accept it though, these magazines have a "closed circle" of contributors and only about one article per time written by an outsider and even that's usually a regular, I know Alan Cowan has been sending them bird photographs for years without success. Still it was very encouraging to have someone like Lord Tweedsmuir admire your style. The thing is too you should have it typed properly, double spacing, if you sent it to me I could do it for you and will enquire round for photographs meanwhile. I met E.P. Gee at the Jorhat drinks party, a funny little bespectacled bank-clerkish little man, he is just off to take the first photographs ever of a litter of white tiger cubs which have been born in captivity in some Indian state.*

*Have seven people coming to tea, Highams, friends and children so must rustle up something. Don't work too hard, it isn't worth it! Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: Feb. 27 [1959] Sealing wax on the simul, flecked with white butterflies & alive with birds. Green pigeon mewing & rustling in rubber trees. And suddenly flying away with a sound like the clatter of hooves. Dahlia hanging cloth heads in the mid-day sun, phlox & antirrhinum, verbena, margots and ladys lace. The claradendron blackening, & very few sweet peas – they have run to leaf. The first of the lime & swallowtails & many whites & holes in the geranium leaves. Strawberries, a little pale, but delicious. Bifty walking on frying pan feet across the tennis court, scratching his ear, swishing his tail ceaselessly rolling like a great black beetle. The pampas grass is beginning to look dry and stiff & lost its silver sheen. The mulberries are pink & the lemon bushes flowering & there is a feeling of expectancy and drawing of breath before the great spring overture beings.

Went down to the school on Wednesday, it was very hot & the children unwashed, well-greased bodies smelt powerfully strong. They stood up in turn & said "GOAT goat means chagoli" – buck toothed boys, almond eyed girls with shocking pink ribbons in their polished heads, thin golden arms with thin golden bracelets round them. I drew a picture on the board & showed them how to pronounce "f" & "th" and felt a great desire to open the windows, buy them paints and skipping ropes and plasticine & let them really learn something. Came back tired smelly & stirred up. The only thing I know I can do is deal with children, & I think I will try, if it does nothing else, it will teach me Assamese. I am translating the stories from

my Assamese book & am going to try to write my own "Children of Bird God Hill"<sup>180</sup> this summer.

Iris to Alan, 3rd Mar 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thinks for your letters which we live gutting (I saw Pim yesterday). Term will be drawing to an end by the time you get this, or anyway the end will be in sight, I'm afraid it won't be a very exciting holiday this one as you'll have to do a lot to help in the house and we're still pretty broke I'm afraid so it'll have to be pretty basic. If only the weather is kind, surely it should be after such a dismal winter. After several days of boiling sun when we've been saying "At last the hot weather is really here" or in my case "Alas the hot weather is here" we had a storm last night and I'm freezing again this morning. I don't mind though, the longer it stays cool the better.*

*You'll be mad with jealousy when you hear what I have got on the verandah - a baby barking deer. It was found in the tea and the go-down Babu's son brought it up this morning, he didn't want to part with it but I persuaded him because he wouldn't be able to look after it properly. It is quite ravishing, about three months old I should think, stands two foot high on tiny pointed toes, with the velvet ears and huge liquid eyes of all baby deer. I have it in a box with straw at the moment and have just given it a strawberry to eat which it loved, it has the beginning of teeth but would be drinking milk mostly I imagine. I have decided to call it (her?) Miranda as I happened to be reading the Tempest and she has the startled innocent look of a Miranda, I do hope I manage to rear her. I shall get her a collar and lead and make a big cage in the paddock where she can run about, but if she wants to go back to the jungle eventually of course I shall let her. I'll take pictures of her for you, wish you could have seen her but perhaps it was better you didn't as it would have been one more thing to leave.*

*Daddy is a bit gloomy about the whole thing as he foresees me breaking my heart once more and he's probably right but I don't think I could get so fond of a deer as a monkey.*

*Yesterday was the Assam-Jorhat Co. polo match and I'm sorry to say it was a walkover by Jorhat, they won 7-1 Gussel Brown, Peter Cruden,<sup>181</sup> Clifford<sup>182</sup> and an Indian were the Jorhat team and they roared up and down the field scoring more or less when they pleased. Cappie and Ian Leetham<sup>183</sup> were the only people on our side who did anything, Tom Darby just pottered in the wrong direction and got in everyone's way, finally his saddle fell off and he had to leave the field but the game was nearly over by that time so it didn't make any difference. There were a lot of people there, the cook had made a coffee cake which he covered with poison green icing and off-white almonds, better than the usual dark purple worms he puts on the cakes, but it tasted jolly nice nevertheless. We didn't go to the club after the match, there would have been a big party I don't doubt but not for us.*

*Sunday, the day before was our eighteenth wedding anniversary, but also the medal golf round and Daddy had arranged ages ago to have the Lobbans and Rosses to lunch. Actually the Rosses came on Saturday evening and stayed the night in order to hear the Scotland/Ireland Rugger match (not a success, Daddy and Ruaridh were sunk in ghastly gloom for at least five minutes afterwards). Sunday was really rather a failure as wedding anniversaries go, I spent the morning at home doing flowers and picking strawberries and they all came rolling back from the club at 2 and we didn't have lunch till three. The cook had really excelled himself with two kinds of curry but everybody was too merry to notice by that time, afterwards I thought they'd go but not a bit they finally left at eight p.m. I was exhausted by that time and we just had a cup of soup and a hot bath and went to bed and that was that.*



*Doug Lobban was quite amusing I must admit, tripping up and down the verandah in one of the big straw hats I keep on the shelf singing "Put your head on my shoulder"! Margaret won the medal which was clever. Caron was here with the ayah being very trying a lot of the time but I blame her parents as they niggle and naggle at her the whole time.*

*I've finally retired from the icy blasts of the verandah and lighted the fire, I gave Miranda another strawberry which she loved and squeaked for more, wouldn't look at her bottle. An expensive animal to keep if she'll only take strawberries. If you have read or heard anywhere what deer like to eat let me know, I think fruit, milk and berries would be safe enough.*

*I finally plucked up courage and went down to the school last Wednesday. I was going to start teaching them English and had prepared little stories on how to pronounce the alphabet but found myself faced with gawky youths of twelve with buck teeth and bass voices and so gave up that idea pretty quickly. There were three classes all jammed into one tiny building the size of my drawing room, they were all being taught English which consisted of them reading sentences out of dull little books "The fat cat sat in the box" and similar nonsense, all together in a sing song drawl that didn't faintly resemble English. I tried to show them how to pronounce "th" and "f" which they thought very funny, but decided that I must start with the younger ones who haven't already got into so many bad habits, so I'm going to do that tomorrow. Even if they learn nothing I'm sure I shall.*

*I've also sent away for some paints, they have no handwork or games of any kind, just sit boxed up with their dull books for four hours. The atmosphere in the school was overpowering to say the least of it, forty odd unwashed small bodies on a very warm day nearly got the better of me and I had a splitting head ache for the rest of the day, but I mean to persevere as it will give me something definite to do and help my Assamese and maybe their English.*

*I do wish this awful ten mile wasn't causing you such agonies, if you run in it this year you won't have to do it again presumably? What with that and your endless work life sounds very dreary. I'll ask Granny to produce the money for the license, and send £3 towards the new guitar (was that right?) I wish it could be more but we are rather broke too, Tom Darby won £25 in a premium bond last week, he would.*

*Twelve o'clock and Daddy dying of hunger, he's on a slimming diet and we live on boiled fish which is so stimulating, no potatoes or bread or fried food. He has lost five pounds so far in five days but I'm not sure its worth it in wear and tear.*

*Must fly, Much love - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 16th Mar 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm thinking of you hard, about 2 hours before the Ghastly Ordeal is due to start. It's a fine day according to the wireless which should make it easier for you, anyway by the time this reaches you it'll all be over and you'll be planning a day's fishing with any luck. I do wonder how the concert went off, I must say I loved the idea of the Liverpool Philharmonic leaping over tables to be fed watery scrambled egg, they must really have done Eine Kleine Nacht justice after all that!*

*Daddy has gone off to the club to the Annual General Meeting and I'm sitting with the smell of Flit heavy in my nostrils and no fire - in other words the hot weather is almost with us. Can't be surprised and its still nice and cool on the verandah but the sun sails like a hot lump on the back of your head when you step outside. Spring is mostly a smell here, the scented slightly sickly smell of flowering trees. Also butterflies which I run after very unsuccessfully for Anne.*

*You'll have probably heard that Fairfield senior school is closing down next year and I'm thinking of bringing Anne out and teaching her by correspondence course if she likes the idea. It'll mean giving up French, Latin, Maths, Science and all the other things I know nothing about and concentrating on Grammar, Geography and Greek mythology which I've forgotten but would like to re-learn! I've asked her what she feels and hope she agrees.*

*Miranda is well, still a little dim but fascinating to watch. I don't know what I shall feed her on when the strawberries and peas are over as she lives on them exclusively. She slithers all over the house now and its really rather odd to find a deer in the middle of the bedroom carpet. The cats are most suspicious and terrified of her and bundles of fur with their tails up go hurtling past me at intervals while Miranda stands and blinks her enormous eyelashes in a surprised way. Anna is going to have kittens soon which is a pity but I hope she'll produce them in a reasonable place so that I can dispose of them quickly. Not very much to report since my last letter, we went into the service yesterday (Church of Scotland) and there was a fairly good congregation though only Daddy and I and Tony Yeates<sup>184</sup> took Communion. We had a couple of drinks afterwards while Cappie tried to sell Daddy yet another horse (only 12,000 rupees my dear chap and hardly passed its twentieth birthday, mind you its never actually – etc. etc!) It took a long time to impress on him the fact that we hadn't one hundred rupees let alone twelve and we didn't get back to lunch till quarter to 3! Daddy went to sleep after his curry and I had great difficulty in waking him in time for supper. After which he went back to bed and was surprised when he woke fresh as a daisy at 2 a.m.*

*This morning I had Lavender & Mrs Raj for coffee, luckily they didn't stay very long, Mrs R. floated up in a gorgeous yellow silk sari dripping gold, made us feel very dull and drab in cotton frocks and Bata's sandals.*

*Time just coming up for you to start. I've had my supper and listened to Binaka Hit Parade<sup>185</sup> (1) That Certain Smile. 2) King Creole and am willing like mad that you won't come 150th - not that I mind you probably do! Daddy isn't back from the club yet, I must go and give Miranda her last bottle and start the dogs off on their race into the garden. I'll finish this to-morrow, am about to start my new book any moment that the cook isn't following me round with saucepans of tomato sauce and Miranda isn't pattering up and telling me she's starving. Have you done anything about that article for the Field?*

*This is the next morning, Daddy arrived at that moment, very pleased with himself as he hadn't got elected onto any committee and we now have no reason to go to the club ever unless we want to. It is a young committee (how do you spell that word), Ruardidh Ross, Denis Wild,<sup>186</sup> Ray Corps and a young Indian with Robert Higham as secretary. Now we can just sit back and criticize!*

*I think it would be a good idea to go to the Continent. I'll ask Celia about the jam factory next Monday. Wish we could finance you but one way and another are very pressed at the moment, also I told Fiona we couldn't finance her trip to Italy which means I can't very well finance yours. Would it be very hard to take your motorbike, or has Campbell not got one? The idea of walking with one of those vast packs on your back is rather grim. I read an article about fishing in France somewhere, will try and find it.*

*Another steaming day, only 9.30 a.m. and too hot to sit outside. Daddy is starting to pluck this week - and so another year starts. If I don't master Assamese this hot weather I never will. My schoolmaster hardly ever comes these days, he's always busy for various reasons.*

*Much love from us both, and lots of lovely rises - Mummy*



Iris with Miranda and Dinah

Iris to Alan, Tuesday 24th Mar 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I seem to have made a complete bog up of the ten mile, and shall have to start being sympathetic all over again to-day, I was sure you said the 16th in one of your letters. And here have I been happily thinking it was all over, never mind it will be by now. This is really an Easter letter, I hope it'll be a fine day and you can catch your first trout to celebrate, though I fear the water will still be too icy. It makes me very home sick to think of the daffodils and baby lambs and the churches full of flowers and catkins though in actual fact one usually fights one way to them through heavy hail storms!*

*But what a heavenly day that was when we went for a picnic with Stephen Grieve to that tarn near Windermere, and the day we went to the point to point with the Manzi Fe's tutor. Here the spring festival of the Hindu's is Holi, a mixture of a primitive fertility festival and a legend of a goddess who had to have a child a day for breakfast. It's one of the less nice occasions as they celebrate it by squirting red paint at each other and everyone who happens to be passing, so its best to stay at home. Daddy has three days holiday from to-morrow which I don't look forward to much as he never knows what to do with himself and gets thoroughly bored and liverish!*

*We made what will probably be our last expedition to the river this year on Sunday, we had spent the night with the Rosses listening to the Rugger match (at least the men listened and I listened to Betty) and they arranged a picnic for Sunday. They hadn't laid on a boat so*

*we had to lug saucepans of curry, fishing rods, ten bottles of beer, gin and water, books, bathing costumes etc. to that place where Daddy and Fiona walked when we went in the boat.*

*A herd of wild elephants had been down it recently and the path was just a squidgy mass and our shoes kept getting sucked off, it was very hot but we swam as soon as we arrived and the water was heavenly, cool but not too cold to just lie and bask in. We lit a fire and cooked the curry (or rather Betty and I did, the men just sprawled about drinking beer and saying how nice and peaceful it was) and afterwards Daddy gave Ruaridh a lesson in casting which meant that one or other of them was constantly swimming the river to dislodge the spoon from a tree trunk.*

*The only thing that spoilt the day was Caron who whined and screamed and refused under any circumstances to enjoy herself, they seems to have made her terrified of everything, the water, the sand that she sank into, the boulders, the elephant marks all reduced her to hysterics and when a couple of Nagas appeared she practically foamed at the mouth. Such a pity as it meant scene after scene and ruined the day for all of us. There were hundreds of butterflies but of course I'd forgotten my net, managed to catch a couple in Daddy's hat.*

*We had Father O'Hara the Catholic priest staying with us this week, in spite of his name he looks like an Indian, a nice, gentle, quiet young man. He has a pretty hard life, as other Indians think he has deserted them and he was stoned last year he told us, but still seems perfectly happy and serene. We have arranged to go up and see the Catholic school and church next week, also to find out how they make their wine.*

*Miranda is well but the servants will insist on picking her up when I'm not there and the result is she has become very nervous. Each day I soothe her back to friendliness with strawberries and green peas and then some silly ass frightens her and I have to start all over again. I don't think she has any brain at all poor darling. The Edyes told me at the club last night that if she is in fact a he, he will become quite dangerous with huge tusk-like teeth and feet that can rip your leg in two, so I'm keeping my fingers crossed.*

*We went to "Private's Progress" last night, quite amusing but palled a bit towards the end. I had one of my sleepless nights afterwards, so am feeling jaded this morning.*

*I've started my book at last, and am really going to enjoy writing it and am quite unconcerned as to whether it ever gets published. Shall call it "Children of Bird God Hill". I've also embarked on a portrait of the Go-down Babu's daughter, a ravishing creature, I haven't got the likeness but enjoy doing it. She and her plain sister came up together and I made the sister sit and read "The Field" all morning which was rather rude. As usual couldn't string a single sentence together in spite of the sixty verbs and five hundred other words I know.*

*The next letter will be home. I asked the Edyes about the jam factory, the one Anto went to was near Cambridge, but there must be others near. They're getting the address. A very happy Easter - lots of love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 15th May 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'll start this but may not have time to finish it as we have a visiting tea taster to see Daddy. A steady downpour outside, I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't hotter with you than here. We had two inches last night and an inch the night before, everything is growing mushrooms except the mushrooms which I look for to eat. The duck and goose are swimming up and down on the puddles on the lawn and all the cook's children have bad colds and Miranda is pretty fed up and so is Daddy, only I don't mind it.*

*Dinah has got nasty raw patches on her back so is a little sorry for herself, we paint her with Gentian Violet which she licks straight off. Candy never emerges from her filthy little blanket except to crawl under my counterpane and suck her feet. So there you have the position in Nazira P.O. in the middle of May. No butterflies of course, I can't think what the poor things must be doing, I've sent away for a net which I hope will arrive in time to let me catch the hundreds that will emerge as soon as the sun comes out.*

*My speech-making ordeal last Saturday was as awful as I'd thought it would be. I set off with my master, the go-down Babu's two daughters, the driver and the driver's son and my heart in my boots. When we got to Nazira instead of taking the left hand turn towards the club, we took a road to the right which took us along a lovely country road, past little villages hidden in palm trees, until we came to the place where the meeting was to be held.*

*There was the usual decorated archway and I was met by a "reception committee" consisting of three men and half a dozen children carrying wilting garlands, one of which was too tight to go over my head so I had to wear it like a lop-sided tiara until I felt I could politely take it off. The road up to the covered enclosure was a foot deep in mud and my shoes kept being sucked off, so what with that and the marigolds over one eye my progress wasn't exactly dignified.*

*There was a fairish crowd, but a lot of them were school children, I got there twenty minutes late but it was three quarters of an hour before the speaker arrived, there were supposed to be two speakers but thank goodness one of them didn't turn up otherwise we should have still been there.*

*The meeting opened with the usual drone by a crowd of girls, then somebody got up and proposed me as president and I had to be garlanded again (more successfully this time) and move into the next chair. I wanted to make my speech then and get it over, but I had to wait until the tenth item on the programme.*

*The first nine items were nearly all speeches as well, I understood bits of them but as the audience were all talking and calling out to their friends it was rather difficult to hear anything. When it was my turn to speak you could have heard a pin drop, in actual fact all I heard was the banging of my heart and the rumbling of my tummy. I got through the first two sentences all right and then went blank, looked hopefully at my piece of paper and couldn't read a word, thought I would scream or be sick, and finally got going again. Everybody just sat and stared without any expression on their faces so whether they understood it or not I don't know. When I sat down the sweat was pouring down my face and back and legs and I was gummed to my chair for the remaining twenty five items. Most of them were speeches. But there was one small boy, aged ten or twelve, who sat with a two-stringed instrument and did the most wonderful rock and roll item I've ever seen, had Laurie London and Elvis Presley beaten into a cocked hat, I wish I had a tape recorder, the child could make a fortune, and so could I for discovering him.*

*We were much cheered by him and had the strength to listen to "Speeches by the Audience" which consisted of endless toothless old men mouthing into the microphone until forcibly removed to make way for the next. At last I was allowed to declare the meeting closed, and was then taken (with my master, go-down Babu's daughters etc.) to have tea and a bowl of curds and sugar, delicious. The afternoon was rounded off by an aged aged man insisting that he was very ill and must be driven into Nazira so I pushed him into the car (that made seven of us, Daddy nearly swooned when I told him) and we listened to his stories of how his daughter's husband beat her, until we pushed him out in Nazira bazaar. I felt rather sorry for him and his beaten daughter, but the others assured me he was drunk. So that was that, and I got home at 8.30 and had my speech churning through my head half the night. Never again.*

*On Sunday we had a fairly quiet day, Daddy played golf with Lumley and I played with myself and then we had a curry and a rest and took the dogs for a walk. On Monday we went to dinner with the doctor acting for Tom Poole, Dr Clarke.<sup>187</sup> He is enormously tall, 6ft 4 at least, and rather nice, he had another man at dinner who had been a commissioner in the Naga hills for years and he was rather interesting, describing the customs of the Nagas but I think he made some of it up to impress us.*

*This is the next morning, the tea taster I described (but you can't read it) arrived yesterday and stayed till after lunch, and in the evening I went to Sibsager to see a dancing party. Daddy wouldn't come so I went with the Highams, the road was so bad that I decided to spend the night with them and have just arrived back, after being stuck on the road which is just about under water. You musn't worry if my next letter is late as we are certainly in for floods, the rice fields look like inland seas with a lot of little houses already marooned.*

*The dancer we went to see was called Priya Gopal,<sup>188</sup> a Manipuri who has toured all over the world. The dancing was lovely, and there was one particular dance with two Manipuri drummers dancing and drumming together which was magnificent - but the evening was spoilt by the behaviour of the audience. During one of the longer dances some of the clever students started to call out remarks and laugh and chatter, Priya Gopal got furious and stopped dancing for a few minutes and at the end said he had never met such an audience in his life, and suggested if they didn't like it they should leave. Nothing happened and during the next dance there was more noise and he stepped forward again and complained and then some of the students started shouting back and others joined in and leapt up and shook their fists and I thought we were in for a full scale riot and started to make for the door.*

*However one of the organising committee got up and soothed things down and there was one more item and that was that. As we left we saw a crowd of students waiting outside the stage door and wondered if we should help but decided to leave them to it. It was the most disgusting exhibition I've ever seen, nobody tried to stop the noise or told the trouble-makers to leave, they were obviously scared of them.*

*Anyway that's the last time that they will ever have a decent dancing party appearing in Sibsager. I wish you could have seen the dancing though, the costumes were gorgeous. Afterwards we (Highams, John Lampett and self) went to a new restaurant that has opened in Sibsager and had a delicious curry which cheered us up as we were all feeling a bit sick at what had happened. We got back to Suntok<sup>189</sup> at about quarter to one and I didn't sleep much what with hard pillows and mosquitoes so am a bit tired this morning, was a bit worried about Miranda too but Daddy seems to have managed to cope.*

*The tea taster who had lunch with us yesterday was very interesting having travelled all over Sikkim and into Nepal and Tibet and brought back the most beautiful photographs. He was in Kalimpong recently when some of the Tibetan monks were fleeing their country and bought some beautiful things from them which they had carried out from their monasteries, a couple of Buddhas among other things one of which is covered in a thick coat of gold. He has one of Candy's puppies.*

*Hope the judo goes well, most amusing description in the Tribune of All-in wrestling, the big moment was apparently when the referee got pinned under King Kong, who was being jumped on by Man Mountain, the audience laughed themselves sick – they would – ugh!*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 23rd May 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*The hot weather has hit us at last, just in time to stop Assam disappearing beneath the Brahmaputra. A good thing for the tea which was beginning to look rather depressed after*



*the continuous rain and wouldn't wither properly for manufacturing. Daddy has been worrying about his tea a lot the last few days as it isn't as good as it should be, he comes back from the factory with his tongue stained deep mahogany and pekoe tannings in his hair, thoroughly brassed off. I think Vibhu is more interested in his new wife than the tea at the moment! All their dogs and puppies have died except one pup, and even that has probably gone by now. A good thing in some ways as the puppies were all going to Indians who have not the remotest idea of how to look after them.*

*A fairly quiet week, my only outing to the club on Monday to see "The Man who never Was" which I thought would be just another war film but was extremely good. You probably know the story, a true one, of the body the British arranged to have washed up for the Germans to find, with secret papers on it telling a lot of lies. It could have been made into rather a repulsive film as they first had to get the body of a man who had just died, and then preserve it, dress it up etc. but it was so well done that it was all quite natural and very exciting. And at least only one dead man was involved, usually in these spy films dozens of people get killed in order to get some bit of information that perhaps wasn't all that important.*

*The club was full as usual, mostly people from Seleng and Moran, Edyes, Merediths, Hopkins etc. They gave us meat pies for supper which gave me the most ghastly indigestion and I hardly slept a wink that night and felt like chewed string all Tuesday. Daddy had indigestion but managed to sleep through it as usual! On Sunday he went in to play in one of Cappies golf competitions, and came back with second prize, a jolly nice cigarette lighter. The golf course was three quarters under water and it was more like water polo than golf apparently, so it was a question of who could lose the least balls and was the strongest swimmer. I didn't go at all, I'd had just about enough of driving over flooded roads, and spent a nice quiet day at home gardening and setting out on walks with the dogs and having to be rescued by the dhobi's wife with an umbrella when it started to deluge.*

*Miranda worried me by being a bit off colour yesterday, I don't know whether it was the heat or my cold she had caught (felt very mis. on Tuesday with a sore throat and one eye closed!) anyway when I went to give her her bottle at four she was panting and whining in her box and wouldn't drink it. Panic of course, and the usual feeling of helplessness, but I ground up a sulpha pill and she drank her six o'clock bottle with that in and this morning seems better, though not quite her lively self.*

*Still I don't feel exactly hilarious myself in this heat, I got up at six and already the sun was beating down and it was hard to think it had ever rained. Yesterday was the Full Moon of Buddha's Enlightenment, last year there was an eclipse that night and the moon was blood red which made it all the more significant somehow, I felt I ought to go and sit under my Bodhi Tree and see if I couldn't get enlightened too - don't suppose you know the story of Buddha, not being on the syllabus, but you should read it sometime.*

*Yesterday I had my lesson and my teacher was in a tizzy as the Deputy Inspector of schools had been to visit him that morning. The D.I. had very generously given him Rs 6 to be used for prizes for the 120 children in the school - actually didn't give him the money but told him to come to Sibsager to collect it - as my teacher said it will cost him Rs 2 by bus to get there and back before he starts. Really they are hopeless.*

*We are translating a small book sent to me by Mr Handikoi [Handique], one of my Assamese friends, which is itself a translation of an old account of the building of some of the tombs here and very interesting and I think I shall put together another article on the subject. Apparently the dead bodies of the kings were preserved in some sort of oil and spices and taken to a town specially built for that purpose, and then when the tomb was ready carried up along a road known as the Road of Corpses, my teacher knows both the road and town (now a village) so I must go and explore there when it gets a bit cooler. The bricks for the*

*vaults were gummed together with vast quantities of treacle, dal, and lime from the shell of a sort of mollusc, and it tells you how many baskets of each was used in each vault. This bungalow is supposed to be built on the tomb of Queen Pulasvari, who asked some holy men to predict the child she was going to have would be a boy or girl. They were so annoyed at this (why?) that they told her that it would be neither a boy nor a girl but a pumpkin, and sure enough it was and she died having it, though whether from shock or what it doesn't say. I feel the bungalow should be haunted, but perhaps it explains my loathing of pumpkins!*

*It's a strange thing but a lot of the Assamese stories tell of queens giving birth to oranges or pumpkins, I wonder why.*

*I have typed seven chapters of my book and have nine more to go so should just manage to finish it by the end of the rains, I'm enjoying everything except the actual typing. Did you see the thing about Robert in the Observer, and a most drippy picture with it (don't tell Granny I said that, but I didn't think it did him justice).*

*I do hope your trip to the continent will come off, I think the kilt an excellent idea but the plastic mac in an envelope probably a mistake, I remember hearing a funny description of a walking tour on the wireless and they spent their whole time trying to get their macs back into the envelopes and then deciding, when it started to rain, if it was worth getting them out again. I should think your grey wind cheater would be better, and if its deluging you can shelter.*

*The great thing is comfortable shoes or boots, your first aid kit should just be sticking plaster, scissors, antiseptic, and aspirin - you'll be able to get other things on the way. Also I shouldn't bother with provisions except perhaps some Horlicks tablets or a few Oxo cubes to make a drink if you're absolutely stuck, I'm sure you'll always get milk and eggs and rolls and fruit along the way. We should be paying £10 for your keep and pocket money for that time so could contribute, and if you can earn five that would see you through.*

*I should go in September when the weather is usually better and the crowds less. If you managed to get a few photographs you could probably write an article. In the Steps of the Poet<sup>190</sup> or something which would pay for the whole thing!*

*Expecting Lumley any moment as he's visiting the garden, so must finish all the letters. Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, May 28th 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*Nearly June, and its still cool and wet poor Daddy, but as everyone else's tea isn't growing either I can't see that it matters much. The papers tell us that the monsoon is approaching so what we're having now I can't think. Nice for me and the geese and Dinah and the tennis lawn, and I think Miranda prefers it to the heat, she got very distressed on the one really hot day we had and didn't seem to know what to do to get cool.*

*My cows have nearly dried up so I'm having to give her powdered milk to drink but she loves it luckily, the peaches are nearly ripe and that'll help me through the next period. I offered to take two Alsations for six months while their owners were away but Daddy has put his foot down and made me refuse. He's probably right as they would have been quite a handful but I would have liked to have then. So many people have an inborn fear of Alsations that their owner is finding great difficulty in getting a home for them. I was a little nervous about their reactions to Miranda but Alsations are so intelligent as a rule that they will never disobey you once they understand you're serious.*

*Had two tea parties and a dinner party this week, fearful strain! The dinner party was last night, the new doctor and Tom Popley<sup>191</sup> who brought lots of photographs of the children. I tried out a new recipe from the back of the Listener, "Chicken Viennoise", you needed*

*mushrooms, tinned tomatoes, red peppers and carrots none of which I had, so had to make do with celery and some watery tomato juice and the result was not quite what I hoped which wasn't surprising.*

*The cook produced some ginger snaps which were like limp cardboard and tasted like it too, so we hastily whipped up some ice cream and I made cheese straws and it wasn't too bad except that Tom Popley pushed most of his cheese straws to one side which was rather rude. Goffy will now have four horses and poor Nita will have to get rid of her old pet, they must both be very upset. It shows that Daddy is right in insisting that we don't flout the rules, I do wish they could clear this Naga business up but don't think they ever will.*

*Tom Popley took the family to Austria on his leave, at vast expense, but the children loathed skiing and Elisabeth got bronchitis so it wasn't a great success. They left at 11.30 and we were just hurrying into the air conditioned room to bed when we heard strange noises and found the doctor had got two punctures and was trying to change the tyres on his own in the middle of the cattle trap, so Daddy sent him home in the Humber and then tossed about imagining him rutting her down the drain. However she turned up smiling this morning so all is well. The roads are in an appalling state apparently.*

*The tea parties were the Bardelois<sup>192</sup> one day and the Highams plus children the other. The Bardelois sat and sat until both their children were yelling with tiredness and I was almost joining in, as usual he did all the talking, and most of it consisted of telling Daddy and I how wonderful we were which made us squirm with embarrassment. Their youngest daughter, now a year old, is ravishing like all little Assamese girls, but very spoilt.*

*The Highams came to tea on Tuesday and ate everything in the bungalow and what they couldn't finish took home in bottles, there was really nothing else for them to do poor dears. They have a school mistress coming to stay to-day who is supposed to look like Brigitte Bardot, great excitement among the planter population but as it's raining I don't think there will be tennis this afternoon so I don't think many of them will see her as she leaves again tomorrow. Just as well perhaps!*

*I went in to the club on Monday, chiefly because I wanted to get some material in Nazira bazaar (there is actually one shop) as it was raining we played ping pong and drank tea and ate rolls in the ballroom while the children hoola-hooped all round. They are all frightfully good at it but I can't do it at all and it makes me feel a complete fool.*

*I got a book out of the library called "The Meaning of Treason" which is about the Englishmen who turned traitor in the last war, makes fascinating reading, I don't quite know why, most of them turn out to be pitiful creatures one is simply sorry for. I heard from the Great Man (Robert) this week, he is just off to stay with Lord Roseberry who has asked him to write a life of his father!*

*So glad to hear the H.M. is going to finance your venture, and of course we shall have to find the money! If you could make it last a week of August and 1st 2 weeks Sept. we should find it easier to do this. Don't follow too closely in Wordsworth's footsteps – if you read the results of his walking tour in France you'll see what I mean! It turned out a very expensive trip indeed! The scholarship sounds too good to be true, and as you say, very hard to come by. Worth having a bash at though. When is the "A" level horror, in June, or July? If Pam can get you a job it would give you a bit extra to spend on the Continent so I should do it. What about camp?*

*Poor Indians, what a fiasco their cricket is going to be!*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo 6th June 1959*

*My dear Alan,*

*Saturday again - I only seem to brush my hair a couple of times and pick up some berries for Miranda and the week has gone - one great advantage of the hot weather, it does streak past. It really is hot now 89° on the verandah at the moment, 10 a.m. We do need it badly and the tea is shooting away, I wish you could see the garden now, it is so much more beautiful than when you were here, acres of glittering green with the feathery shade trees dappling it and the women moving through it like swans.*

*Orchids are cascading, off a lot of the trees and I have three kinds out in the compound now, my favourite, an apricot flushed pink at the tips of the petals and very sweet smelling; a pale gold with purple tongues, and a pale lavender with an ice blue centre.*

*I tried putting flowers into your last letter but they get broken when they're flattened as they're all trumpet shaped. The pink cassias are a sheet of flower (the trees behind the hedge on the right of the tennis court), and altogether when the sweat clears from in front of one's eyes for a minute one sees that it is the most beautiful time of year, Nazira is a wonderful sight, the laburnum by the first tee of the golf course is the most gorgeous thing you've ever seen.*

*At last I have a butterfly net, Bette Ross sent me some netting which she had been going to make into a veil for a hat and I have just handed it to the Punjabi, before I had walked back to the house across the lawn he was following me with the frame finished, so I have only to sew it together and I shall be ready.*

*Miranda's run is the best place to wait for them as the poor things get imprisoned. Miranda is sitting under the Chinese Hat panting, she seems to want to sit half in sun and half in shadow (for camouflage I suppose). The enclosed photo was taken soon after I got her, she is smoother and darker and bigger now, and more angular – not so pretty in fact though still very attractive. She was half way across the cattle trap by the front gate this morning when I caught her, I think she wanted to go and talk to some cows but I shall have to keep her locked up all the time if she starts that. The leeches have started, also peaches, so I shall be set up with food for her for a bit, I spend my walks these days scanning trees for berries and then grovelling about on my hands and knees picking them up, the coolies think I am slightly touched!*

*Last Sunday Dr Clarke and I had made an arrangement to take our breakfast to the Sibsager tanks and paint, we were going to leave the house at seven, but when I crawled out of bed at six it was pouring with rain, so rather relieved I went back to bed. However, we were in the middle breakfast at eight when he turned up, so we decided to go anyway, though it was very overcast. Daddy wouldn't come of course so he went off to play golf and we set off when I'd seen the cook, fed Miranda etc and reached the tank at about ten.*

*The water and the sky were leaden grey, and the temples a dirty brown and the trees a lifeless green, but he was sure he could make a picture of it so rather gloomily I plonked myself beside him and set to. I only had one grubby rag, my oil was caked and I had no turpentine, also my board wasn't big enough for the paper – typically disorganised in fact. However I soon became immersed in the impossible task of trying to paint a flat sheet of water and an incredibly monsoon sky, piles of purple and blue and grey clouds, in banks and layers and changing all the time.*

*Needless to say we were soon surrounded by a crowd of students breathing heavily down our backs and making comments that they thought we couldn't understand. After one of them had watched me for five minutes I couldn't stand it any more and asked him what he thought of it. "Very good" he said and then turned to a friend who had joined him and said "Look, she's painting that" pointing at the Technical Institute which was behind me!*

*I got very hot and covered in paint from head to foot and my face and the canvas became embedded with bits of grass but I enjoyed it all the same, Dr Clarke did a very nice water colour and an oil sketch, he is much better than I am of course, but Daddy liked my picture*

so I expect it will join the mali and the other gruesome efforts in the spare room. I have been dabbling at it all week and the sky now looks as if Anna and her kitten had been romping over it with sooty feet.

The kitten is becoming a bit of a worry as the poor thing is still on the roof and must be feeding exclusively off bats and lizards and terribly wild. I am sending an expedition of malis up through the roof in the spare room to try and catch it, but I don't know if they'll manage. Anna is really a silly ass.

On Sunday evening we were sitting in the Air Conditioned room reading our library books when the bearer arrived breathless to say a wild cat was chasing the cook's chicken. Daddy very reluctantly went out and shot it, chiefly because of our geese and possibly Miranda as it was a huge beast, about the size as Dinah with a short, faintly ringed tail, and a flat cat face. We felt rather beastly as we both made a vow not to kill anything again. Magi (the fierce cowman) took it away next morning to eat!

On Monday evening we went to the club to see "The Titanic", a good but very sad and unsuitable film for the beginning of the rains. The bit at the end when they're all singing "Nearer my god to thee" had us all whooping with dismay. Celia is arranging an expedition to the Manas and asked us to go but we're already going with Robert Shaw, hope we catch lots more fish than they do, hope I catch one, anyway. The Corps are also going so I must beat Lavender.

On Wednesday a Mr Shaw came to have tea with us, he is a temporary labour officer and came to have a union meeting, Daddy couldn't get any of the coolies to complain about anything; he got them all eating out of his hand and he kept telling them that as they had a union they must use it but when Mr Shaw asked them what complaints they had they just shook their heads and that was that. Mr Shaw is apparently seventy, though its hard to believe and has lived a very interesting life in the Naga Hills, I think I told you about him. He's writing a book at the moment about all the hill tribes of Assam and where they came from, I think he has known a lot but now he's getting a bit muddled, he spent about an hour telling us of a theory that the Khasis are one of the lost tribes of Israel. Still he's more interesting to talk to than most people who can't see further than the nearest tea bush.

That seems to be about all for this week, we haven't done any entertaining, too hot and Daddy is up at some awful hour of the morning. Yesterday Lumley visited the garden and Daddy was up at 3.30 a.m. I usually get up at six and its lovely, every bird and cricket shouting its lungs out and every spider spinning for dear life, there is one that busies itself making a web between the tea pot and the verandah chair each day.

Miranda and I do a tour of the compound before breakfast, she eats the berries from under the rubber trees and then dashes across to the plum tree and swallows as many as she can whole, occasionally stopping to grind up a stone.

Daddy and the dogs have just come back in a state of collapse, the Land Rover having broken down in some remote part of the garden and they having to walk back. Candy is just about dead poor darling, she can hardly put one foot in front of another and Daddy had to carry her half the way. I think this is the hottest day we have had so far, but the monsoon is expected in a day or two.

Granny found a lost letter of yours & sent it on – was amused to read your solution of how to deal with Fiona – could apply to women generally, also to men – women's magazines are always advising their readers to Let Him Think He's Having His Way!

I love Hopkins,<sup>193</sup> but have read very little of him, hope you have a book you can bring home.

Much love, don't work too hard.

Mummy

Iris to Alan, 13th June 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Another Saturday only about two days after the last one! Thank you for your letter, glad the weather is still good but I do hope it won't break on the first day of the holidays as it usually does. Here we've had some stinking pre-monsoon days but this morning it's cooler again. Last Sunday was the hottest day of the year and of course, typically British, we all rushed in and played golf of all ghastly things.*

*It was the medal round and at six in the morning, when I was having my stroll with Miranda, the sweat was pouring off me. We got into Nazira at 8.30 and after playing four holes I was nearly apoplectic, my face plum red and my nerves in ribbons. My poor little caddy was deaf and dumb and kept walking into me which didn't help, anyway I gave up and had a cold shower and sat under a fan drinking Ginger Ale and reading the Daily Telegraph till the rest of the sodden forms came staggering in. Daddy and Co. played eighteen holes and Daddy won second prize, a jolly nice box with two packs of cards presented by Air France. So it was all worth while, Betty Ross won the booby prize which pleased her a lot!*

*Daddy is doing rather well out of his golf these days, a cigarette lighter last week and now this. I fear they will bring his handicap down. We had a curry and then dashed into the Air Conditioned room for a nice long rest but something went wrong with the electricity and the Air Conditioner kept nearly stopping and letting out dismal whining noises all afternoon, nevertheless Daddy managed to go into a deep sleep and didn't wake till I had had tea, taken the dogs for a walk, and fed Miranda. He was then very annoyed that he couldn't go to sleep that night.*

*We have had a lot of engine trouble this week, on Wednesday night Daddy spent most of the time in the factory dealing with slipping ropes, came back at five a.m. covered with oil and sweat and fell straight into bed. He seems to have sorted it out. Vibhu can't see two inches in front of his glasses so is not a terribly good engineer and his hands like bananas according to Daddy. In spite of everything we are making lovely tea which is the main thing.*

*On Wednesday I had rather an exhausting day, with Lavender in the morning, and a painting expedition in the afternoon. It was very hot and John Lampett, Doctor Clarke and I trailed all the way to the Lakmijan river and sat on the edge of a crumbling bank being chewed alive by mosquitoes and painted the view up the river towards the island. I set out at four and we didn't get to the river till half past five. It was a leaden sort of day with the hills looking colourless and the water grey and I couldn't cope at all, though Dr Clarke made a nice picture of it, finding all sorts of colours that weren't there, least not to my eyes.*

*The nicest part was the picnic we had afterwards we poured all the remains of our turpentine onto some damp bamboos and boiled a kettle and drank tea and ate sandwiches and smoked and talked till it was dark. I didn't realise how long this was because by the time we got back to Nazira it was half past eight, and I had only just crossed the main bridge when I met Daddy in the Land Rover coming to look for me.*

*He had visualised us all upside down in a drain and was very worried, chiefly about the Humber I think. I hadn't even got a decent picture to show for my efforts. This afternoon Dr Clarke and I are going to paint again while Daddy plays tennis at the B.B. He (Dr.C.) is terribly keen but gives me an inferiority complex as he is so good. Still it's better than sitting all afternoon staring at people playing tennis and making conversation to Mrs. Bardeloi.*

*I have just got a parcel of poster paints and crayons up from Calcutta for the school and I wonder if I shall have any success teaching them. They will probably get themselves into such a mess that their parents will remove them on the spot. I have started them off on clay modelling, at least my teacher has, but he says they aren't very keen, all they want to do is make bows and arrows.*



*I have written an article on Cherideo which I'm going to send to the Statesman with a drawing of one of the burial mounds.<sup>194</sup> It might bring me in a few rupees. They published a letter I sent in reply to an article about some deer. The author had seen several sambar with long scratches down their sides and said that these (of course) were caused by a tiger as a deer's hide was too tough to be torn by bamboos or any other kind of natural object. I couldn't believe this as Miranda has scratched herself quite badly even in her run, so I wrote and said so, and also said I thought it was ridiculous to suggest that a tiger would get near enough to a deer (several deer) to scratch its side without being able to kill it. I shall be interested to see if there is any comment from the author, who is quite a famous naturalist,.*

*Miranda is well, and this week I've been letting the bearers give her her last meal and shut her up quite successfully, though she won't take her bottle from them. Still it means that I can now go out in the evening without being in a panic about getting back before dark. She was in terrific form this morning, bucking and prancing. I wish I could get a companion for her, she tries to get Dinah to play but she won't, I had just organised an expedition up to the roof to rescue the kitten when Anna decided to bring her down, and dumped her in the godown. It took us half an hour to catch the little devil, who spat like fifty snakes and sunk one tooth into the sweeper's thumb before we got him into a sack. However after a few days in the spare bathroom he is playing with me and letting him stroke his tummy, though I haven't tried to pick him up yet. He is enchanting of course, all eyes and whiskers, grey with striped legs, Anna is on heat again and yelling her head off but I'm determined she shan't have any more kittens if I can help it, she is very thin and anyway I couldn't stand that chloroforming business again.*

*John Darby is back and has said he doesn't want Bifty which is wonderful, I hated the thought of him going. He'll just have to eat grass and bhoosie and like it as we can't afford to feed him properly but with no exercise he should be all right. That seems to be all on the animal front.*

*I've been reading a lovely book this week, "The Flame Trees of Thika" by Elspeth Huxley, you would enjoy it. Its about her childhood in Africa. Also read "Venture to the Interior" by Laurens Van der Post, an old book, also about Africa and very good too. Am embarking on Madame Pompadour now just for a change.*

*My own book has reached about half way mark, the end of the seventh chapter. I hope to finish it before I come home.*

*Do hope the pressure of work isn't becoming too hectic, thank heavens I've finished with exams, though I was actually rather good at them, having a more or less photographic memory for a period of twenty four hours. I knew every poem on the syllabus by heart I remember, and still know quite a few of them. I've asked Fiona for John Betjeman's Collected Poems for my birthday, so you'll no doubt be asked for a contribution, hope that's all right! Granny is sending me the Biography of the Year - guess what? Robert said he was writing an introduction to the House of Common for American Tourists, Sixth Forms and other simple and gullible types, or words to that effect. You must take him up on that.*

*Raining again, so it looks as if tennis and painting are off after all, never mind its lovely rain.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, June 28th Cherideo 1959*

*My dear Alan,*

*Monday, and a better day to write letters as there is no dhobi, and there is also a faint chance that we might have done something interesting over the week end! this morning has been driving me mad actually, every time I sit down to start writing, the bearer knocks on the*

door to say the cook wants some rice or the sweeper wants some Vim, now he's just come to say some men have arrived to dig a hole and where shall they dig it! Its the most extraordinary country, you think you have all the time in the world but in actual fact you never get half an hour without interruption. Its v. hot this morning, so one way and another I'm in a v. bad temper! Never mind, June is nearly over which brings us a month nearer the end of the hot weather and nearer coming home.

A very uneventful week, and I've been a bit off colour with a tummy upset, but am better now. I think the tummy was probably due to our new water supply, Daddy's tank on top of the hill is finished and he opened the pipes from the big tank (the one we boated on) to let the water through to fill it, and it gushed through with such force that it took the lining of the tank with it. With the result that our water has been brown and black and orange and most peculiar tasting. Its all very satisfactory though as everyone said the water wouldn't be able to get up such a steep hill. Daddy has been having a lot of trouble in the factory this week, a bolt in the main engine broke and nobody could prize the broken pieces out of the hole and Daddy has ruined all his shirts with great blobs of oil as he spent most of the time working on it. They got most of it out in the end, and are hoping for the best.

I went round the factory the other day while they were manufacturing the first time I have seen the new machines in action<sup>195</sup>. Rather fun seeing the leaf disappearing into their jaws and being spat out wet and pulpy, then taken to the fermenting room to turn orange, and finally being fed into the firing machines and pouring out in hot black fountains of finished tea. Daddy pointed at one mount of tea and said "Thats worth about £3,000" very casually lord it made me mad!

We had a fairly quiet week end. It was Burra Bungalow tennis on Saturday which we went to, I took my bathing dress but couldn't be bothered to swim in the end. Yesterday, Sunday, Daddy played golf in the morning and I went painting again with Dr Clarke. It was an overcast day and we went to Gargaon Palace, and he painted one of the arched doorways and I drew portraits of the children who crowded round to watch. They had the most wonderful Assamese faces, with downfolded eyes and squashed noses, they also smelt to high heaven but were rather sweet. I managed to exchange quite a bit of Assamese with them, they were fascinated with my crayons which they had never seen before, but were quite satisfied when I gave them the pictures I'd done, and some drawing pins. Such a pity they have to turn into rude and noisy "students".

There is still a bit of trouble in Jorhat I gather, and armed police are everywhere which isn't very pleasant (not here, in Jorhat). Everyone has forgotten what the original trouble was about and is just taking the opportunity to have a whale of a time looting and fighting. Half Assam is still under water and starving, what a muddle it all is, and the government sits in its lovely houses in Shillong doing sweet nothing. I suppose we're not much better, sitting in our lovely bungalows on our tea estates and grumbling at being disturbed by our servants!

The livestock are well, but Anna the wretch has taken her kitten onto the roof again, it has been playing round the bungalow for the last week getting very tame, and I was going to let my master take it this week. Now I suppose I shall have to start again from scratch. She has been driving us nuts generally, with her endless howling, and we thinks he must be slightly touched. On Thursday we spent the day collecting baby mice, it was a sort of nightmare, every time we went out onto the verandah there was another tiny figure plodding across it. We picked them all up and put them in a box and I tried to feed them on cotton wool soaked in milk, and out of eye droppers, but their eyes weren't even open and the wouldn't feed. In the end I got some chloroform and put them all to sleep which made me very upset as usual, but it was the only alternative to watching them starve to death. I suppose the cats would have made as good a job of it but I couldn't bear that.

*Miranda has a new collar and her face has nearly healed, there were two letters in the paper last week saying that they (the writers) had both seen deer with tigers claw marks on them, nobody has written to support me, I feel Daddy ought to send a letter from One Who Knows! Anyway I'm still not convinced.*

*We are enlarging Miranda's pen once more, and she will have to start eating pineapples now as the peaches are finished and the pineapples just starting, wish I could get you some home. I made five ounces of peach jam this week but overdid the sugar and its rather gluey, we never eat jam anyway but it seemed a pity to waste them.*

*Your ordeal will have started,<sup>196</sup> and we are thinking of you and keeping our fingers crossed. I'm sure it'll be quite manageable but it isn't a matter of life and death in any case. I've just read "The Swarm of Bees" a novel about Napoleon, seen through the eyes of his mother, very good, what a grisly lot his family were. I don't suppose you'll ever want to hear his name again after this. No news of my article, I don't suppose it will be accepted as it can't be a subject that interests everybody. We are looking forward to getting the Phoenix<sup>197</sup> very much.*

*Sorry for a dull letter – all the best & remember your life is planned – or don't you believe that? It's very comforting in a crisis!*

*Much love from us both.*

*Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 5th Jul 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*A grey drizzly morning, blessed relief after a spell of blazingly hot weather, but I gather from the wireless that your temperatures are about the same as ours - amazing! Do hope the summer lasts through the holidays, I have a feeling it will, being the year Daddy was due home, and he nearly always brings good weather with him. Its too much to hope that it will last through next year as well.*

*We spent the first night away from home since I got Miranda on Saturday, when we went up to Moran to see some Amateur Dramatics and spent the night (what was left of it) with Dr Clarke in Nazira. I was a bit worried as to what would happen if Miranda wouldn't go into her box with the servants, and had meant to put her away before we left, but it was so fiery hot at 5.30 when we had to go that I hadn't the heart. The result was that I spent a good bit of the evening worrying about her, needlessly as it turned out as she had gone in quite happily, taken all her bottles, and in fact not missed me at all!*

*You can imagine Daddy's comments at having to put on long trousers and a long sleeved shirt in the middle of the afternoon, it was just about the hottest day we'd had and by the time we got up to Moran (went with Dr Clarke and John Lampett) we were sodden and squashed. However everyone else was the same, and the wretched people in the play had to act some of it in duffle coats.*

*The play was called "Book of the Month" and was a very light comedy about a very respectable family in Cheltenham whose eighteen year old daughter suddenly writes a book, bringing them all in. They are all made out (in the book) to be living wildly immoral lives, and of course when they read it they are horrified and feel their real lives will be ruined. However it all comes out right in the end needless to say.*

*It was quite well done, the women were good but the men were all long and drippy in glasses, and mumbled rather. It was the sort of play that needed to be very slick, and not really suitable for amateurs at all. I was cross with Daddy who didn't come back after the interval but stayed in the bar talking to his buddies, felt the empty chair looked rude but I*

*don't suppose anyone noticed. Afterwards there was eats and dancing. I ate but didn't dance, much too hot, but just as we had decided to go home the storm broke.*

*The rain simply thundered down, and so did the thunder, and lightning shot down the sky all round us. When we got back we found the whole of Nazira plunged in blackness, the electric light system having broken down. It was two in the morning and we were all pretty tired and not looking forward to spending a sleepless night, either suffocating with the windows closed, or being eaten alive by mosquitos with them open. However, we had just got used to the idea when the lights came on again and all was well.*

*Next morning, Sunday, was the medal round which Daddy had arranged to play in, and Dr Clarke suggested he give me some lessons in oil painting. He sat me down in front of a flower and some leaves and I set off, but with his critical eye on me felt nervous and he kept saying "But don't you see those blue lights" and I didn't but pretended I did. The result was a horrible mess and I felt I never wanted to pick up a paint brush again. Actually he gave me a lot of tips which I shall practise in private, it is very depressing painting beside someone who is so much better and produce with one stroke the effect you have been trying for half an hour. He himself did a water colour sketch from memory of a view he'd seen here, and produced a charming picture in twenty minutes, most frustrating. I think I shall stick to portraits in future.*

*We went into the club afterwards for a drink, Daddy had played very badly but it would have been positively embarrassing to have taken home still another golf prize. We all decided that we must produce a play in Nazira, as long as there were only eight people in it so that the other eight could watch. I don't suppose it will get any further than that, you need someone absolutely dynamic to bustle around organising this sort of thing, John Lampett is very keen but a bit young to be able to be bossy enough, Cappie would be the type only he would be useless as a director and would end by offending everyone. Perhaps in about five years time we shall bring it off, by that time I shall qualify for the part of great grandmother.*

*We have an engineer coming to stay to-day which is rather a wearying thought, I hate having someone permanently in the house so that one always has to be making conversation, especially as my small talk on the subject of pistons and ball bearings is extremely limited. Never mind, he and Daddy can discuss them, while I work out how I can think of another forty thousand words for my book.*

*I find after writing ten chapters that I've only used about 29,000 words, and the average novel is 60,000. As it's a children's book I suppose it needn't be quite as long, but still. My article about Cherideo has been accepted so I will send it along in due course, they didn't want the picture I sent with it though, not surprising as it looked like a hedgehog in a rough sea - it was meant to be one of the burial mounds with tea bushes all round it.*

*Miranda is well, the peaches are over and she is now eating a pineapple a day plus the usual berries and wild figs. I think she has boy friend as a barking deer has been calling a lot in the jungle quite near the bungalow, even in the day time. Miranda doesn't seem to think much of his voice as she doesn't attempt to answer or take any notice in fact, I wonder what would happen if I let her go, I daren't risk it as I feel sure she would be shot, if not by one of the labour, by a Naga. They get Rs. 30 for a deer in the bazaar.*

*The dogs are looking scruffy with skin trouble, I seem to have found the right powder for it at last, but it'll take time for the hair to grow in again. I sent Anna's kitten down in a large box on Saturday, to my master, I wasn't very happy about it but he promised that if it was any trouble or tried to run away he would let me have it back. He says his house is full of mice so it will have fun as long as line dogs don't chase it too much. Anna disappeared for a day after it had gone to try and find it presumably, but she is back now, thin and covered in cobwebs.*

*We had a very good film last Monday, "Windom's Way" with the gorgeous Peter Finch as a doctor in Malaya, the photography was superb and it was quite exciting, and not so ridiculous as most films in the east, they didn't live in a palace and the wife looked sweaty and unattractive quite a lot of the time which made us all feel better. Our Cinemascope is a great magnet and people come from all over the place on a Monday*

*Sorry about the peculiar typing, there is a bit missing from my carbon.<sup>198</sup> You will have tackled quite a bit of your exam by now and I hope not feeling too gloomy about the results, though that is often a good sign. Do keep your papers, I should like to see them. As you say the blissful feeling of relief afterwards will make it all worth while, I can remember to this day how I felt after taking my School Certificate. Can also remember the Headmistresses face when she came in to give us the results, half the form failed that year!*

*I'll do my best to get the shirt home via Cappie, other wise you'll have to get one at home. Do hope the wonderful weather will hold through the holidays, it will make all the difference to your trip, though trudging along in a temperature of 90 degrees won't be so much fun. You can sit under haystacks and drink wine, and I hope send us lots of postcards.<sup>199</sup> Do you have to follow Wordsworth every step of the way? I like most of W. and a lot of Tennyson and Shelley and all of Keats, but my favourite lot are the 17th century poets, Herrick and Marvell and Donne. I think it was because we "did" them for School Cert. which might be expected to put you off for life but didn't. My favourite poem is Henry King's "Exequy on his Dead Wife" which sounds grim but is wonderful. I'm glad you're doing the Tempest, which you've had the advantage of seeing, yes I recognised the quotation, as a matter of fact I was reading the Tempest when Miranda arrived and hence the inspiration, though perhaps Shakespeare would not see it like that.*

*I wrote to Mr Marriott at the beginning of term, saying I would leave the arrangements about a university place in his hands. He seemed to think he could pull the necessary strings at Cambridge, and I will write to Robert about Worcester.<sup>200</sup> I suggest you talk to Mr Marriott, but I seem to remember him saying that it was too early yet, and that one of the universities would book so far ahead. Perhaps when you hear the results of your A level, something concrete could be done.  
Lots of love, and all our thoughts. Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 13th Jul 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Another Monday, the sweat pouring down my back, parrots screaming in the rubber trees, malis mowing, and the compound through my window looking very beautiful with cannas, gladioli, and shrubs of every colour in bloom. You wouldn't recognise it, it is so green and colourful now, not at all like the dry and rather bare place it was when you were here. In hibiscus alone I have scarlet, apricot, lavender, white, cream, puce and sugar pink, and there is one shrub, tecoma, which is hanging in a solid fountain of orangey gold on that frame by the sunken garden, at least fifty flowers on each spray. Miranda likes them but fortunately can't reach the main plant, and has to content herself with the fallen flowers. She looks very attractive standing under it in the morning, her coat almost as gold in the sunlight.*

*She has been giving us a lot of trouble this week, by refusing to go into her box at night. On Monday we went into the club to change library books and other odd jobs, and got back at about 8 p.m. to find the servants all in a tizzy because they hadn't been able to get her in. It was almost dark by then, and I stood with a lantern outside her box coo-ing and holding out plates of pineapple, she would come right up to me and snatch something off the plate and then prance off again, a wild look in her eye. Unfortunately I daren't grab her by the collar*

any more because her instinct is to lash out with her hooves which are sharp as razors and could rip your arm or leg right open. So after an hour of this there was nothing to do but to leave her. We turned on all the lights around and I spent a horrible night, a lot of it awake and the rest dreaming that I went to her cage in the morning and found only one small hoof left.

However she survived, and on Tuesday went into her box like a lamb so I thought the servants must have frightened her in some way. However on Wednesday we had the same performance again, this time with me there, and we discovered that there was another wild deer about, a boyfriend I suppose, several people saw him and Miranda must have got wind of him. I had another restless night, but found that the chowkidar had gone to see her at about eleven and she had put herself to bed, so there was no need for me to have worried. The next day I got all the malis cracking on her run, making the wire as leopard proof as we could, and there we've had to leave it. She was out again on Saturday for half the night, as Daddy says we must either pen her in behind barbed wire and never let her loose, or else she must take her chance.

I thought of trying to capture the boy friend as a companion for her, but someone who came to lunch on Friday said that the male is inclined to get vicious and kill the female. He (the guest) had had a barking deer which had literally skinned itself to death. Daddy says the only way to get my attention is to behave like Miranda so last night he capered round the drawing room refusing to go to bed, tossing his head and squeeking and looking quite ridiculous, the dogs got madly excited and I was reduced to feeble giggles.

It's been a very hot week, with the temperature in the nineties and occasional bursts of rain to cool it temporarily. On Wednesday I had the Raj's and Vibhu's young brother, a boy of nineteen, up to drinks. He is the split image of Vibhu and a nice boy and it wasn't too bad an evening, though I didn't feel there was enough to eat. Home made cheese biscuits and the cook stuffed some eggs and made cheese worms but there was rather a shortage of everything. On Friday we had this tea taster to lunch, the cook made an enormous chicken pillau and the tea taster took one or two grains of rice and said he only ate an omelette at mid-day however we chewed our way through it quite successfully.

We had a quiet week-end, Lumley was in Shillong so there was no tennis, and yesterday we spent the morning at home painting. Daddy did a water colour and I did an oil painting of a bowl of flowers, his was much better of course but mine was an improvement on my usual muddy efforts and I think I am getting the hang of the paint.

At tea time it poured with rain and the temperature dropped ten degrees, and when we took the dogs to the tank for a walk it was almost cool and the most beautiful evening, the sky and water every shade of blue and gold. There are many compensations for the heat I must say.

In the evening Daddy read a book called "No Bars Between" by the man who trains lions and tigers for Bertram Mills and kept reading me out bits of it and telling me how much I would enjoy it, but there won't be much left for me to enjoy now. There are some amazing pictures of him walking down the high street with his little daughter by one hand and a tiger by the other. I was reading the life of Van Gogh the painter which is very sad, he was such a miserable and slightly mad man, completely mad in the end.

[Typed for me - a different ending for my sisters]

Do hope that by the time this arrives your ordeal will be over and you'll be enjoying your two weeks of blissful respite. Am longing to hear how you found it. Cappie says he will take the shirts, and we will send £25 for the trip, which I expect will seem a reasonable sum by the H.M. Absolutely all we can rise to I'm afraid, so if you run out you'll have to leave Wordsworth and hurry home! Or you might be able to help in some French harvesting.



*The dak wallah<sup>201</sup> is waiting so is Daddy for his lunch, I got off to a slow start this morning, the cook kept running after me foaming at the mouth and saying there were four snakes on top of his house but we haven't found them so far!*

*Lots of love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 20th Jul 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letters which cheer me up a lot in the middle of the worst month of the year here – very hot and not near enough to the end to be able to say its nearly over. This last week has been particularly hot and we seem to have been having a more sociable time than usual and getting tired which aggravates things.*

*We had the club on Monday, the Highams to dinner on Wednesday, out to the Bardelois on Thursday, and the Rosses for the night on Sat., and at midnight when we were playing bridge with them the storm broke and three inches of rain fell in about ten minutes, not to mention all my cannas, gladiolis, a couple of gardenia bushes and most of Daddy's green crop. It was a terrific storm, however it was so welcome that we didn't mind the damage.*

*Anyway to go back to the beginning, the film was "Love is A Many Splendoured Thing" and was rather drippy, the colour had all gone bluey purple and most of the film consisted of the hero and heroine running up to the top of a hill hand in hand, staring into each other's purple faces, and then running down the other side. Before it we had a 1957 News Reel of a lot of misty little men dashing up and down a field winning an old old cup final, so it wasn't a very inspiring evening one way and another. We rounded it off by eating plates of hard fried eggs and raw sausages, well moistened with our sweat as we bent over them. How the British amuse themselves out East!*

*On Tuesday we spent the day recovering from this orgy of gaiety, and on Wednesday it was hotter than ever. The cook made a souffle for dinner and when I went to look at it at 6 p.m. it looked as if the cat had been sick, the fridge had broken down and it hadn't set and everything was swimming in melted ice and the juice from the dogs meat. I nearly flung myself, the souffle and the cook into the water supply tank, however fortunately it was only the Highams and they didn't mind drinking warm yellow water out of a glass for their pudding.*

*Since then I have been locking the fridge to stop the servants opening and shutting it, but this is almost worse as Daddy demands a glass of water every time he comes in and I have to thud round the bungalow and compound looking for the keys. The fridge has become my big moan, as all the other managers bungalows have big new fridges with deep freeze departments, Lumley has two, and I've still got my tiny little thing and by the time the dogs meat and the water has gone in there isn't room for anything else, I blame everything that goes wrong onto the fridge, and Daddy is sick of the sound of the word!*

*On Thursday we went to the Bardelois in the evening, miles and miles as they are at Gelakey which is three quarters of an hours drive. I was very tired that evening and could hardly keep awake, stared at Bardeloi in a trance and concentrated on not yawning which kept me awake. They gave us a lovely curry which made up for some of the boredom, but I was jolly glad to get back into my air conditioned room that night.*

*Friday was a fearful day (this letter seems a rather dismal one but you know how I exaggerate). One of my Assamese friends came to call on me at 10.30 a.m. and left at three, and no sooner had I swallowed a few spoonfuls of rice and laid myself on my bed, than three more of them arrived. Daddy was laughing like mad and telling me it served me right for Taking an Interest in the Country. By the time the second lot left I had been making*

conversation for seven hours in a temperature of about 130°, truly it was terrible. I hope they will now leave me alone for six months.

My first visitor was a keen historian who has published quite a few books, and he said the bird bath and pillar on the front verandah were emblems of the god Siva and quite rare, which was rather a thrill and I have been scraping off the moss and fungus from the pillar and cutting down the shrubs that were smothering it. They ought to go into a museum really.

On Saturday evening the Rosses plus Caron<sup>202</sup> and the Ayah came to spend the night, chiefly for Bette to do my hair but it's such a long way from Deopani<sup>203</sup> that we asked them to stay and persuaded our reluctant husbands to play bridge. We enjoyed it though we are all very bad and out of practise, Daddy is the best and kept telling me what not to do and we had some pretty vicious conversations until the storm broke which soothed all our nerves.

Yesterday, Sunday, was a service in Nazira which we all went to, the Lobbans were there with their two children, Jennifer aged 11 and Ramsey, 7. They missed the plane in Aberdeen and the Comet in London, as I think I told you, but finally turned up three days late, nice looking children and seem to be enjoying themselves though I don't know what they find to do in this weather. We had a large curry and the Rosses left at tea time, and I simply slumped, staggered out for a short walk with the dogs and then had a bath and got into bed in the air conditioner. This week I intend to do nothing and see nobody, but I don't suppose it will work out that way, in fact I'm going in to see Daddy play polo this evening. He is collecting Cappie's horses so we shall have a stable full.

Miranda is in a terrible mess this morning, with her face all cut and scratches and cuts on her sides - and no collar. She must have got her collar caught up in something and lashed around trying to get it off. She is a mass of nerves too, poor little thing she does make life hard for herself. She will never go into her box in the evening, and the chowkidar has to wait up till eleven or twelve to shut her up, but last night she wouldn't even go in then so he called the cook and bearer and they drove her in, and whether that was when she got hurt I don't know. From now on she will have to take her chance and stay out. Apparently her boy friend was round again so that was probably upsetting her.

Dinah has been giving me a bit of trouble too as she has got maggots in her tail, right underneath where she must have had a sore I didn't see. I have been pouring in kerosene, turpentine, Dettol and various powders and I think the maggots are dead, but they leave a deep hole which isn't healing. She is an awful baby about having anything done to her, and screams and lashes about and makes it as difficult as she can. One way and another my animals are being their usual worrying selves, I often wonder why I keep them, but life is so empty when I don't.

I've been experimenting with my oil pastels and did a portrait of myself which is quite an eye opener, although mid-day in the middle of the hot weather is perhaps not the best moment to choose for a self portrait. The pastels aren't easy to use as you have to mix them on the paper by smudging them together with your finger, but they are quite effective for portraits. Dr Clarke has done a little water colour which I will try and enclose, the road up to the bungalow is on the left, you probably recognise it. He did it in about five minutes and I think it's rather nice. Can't find an envelope.

I've just got your letter about the exam, and am truly sorry for you, but by this time you will be revelling in the aftermath. Cappie says he will take the shirts (one white and one green) so I hope you won't have to buy anything else for your trip. The currency restrictions make life very difficult as we can only send a certain amount home each month and in the months when there are school bills it leaves nothing over - and the school bills seem to drag on for most of the year! Anyway I hope you won't be short. Let us know when you are due to start and give us a rough sketch of your route so that we know whereabouts you will be on

what days, not having read Wordsworth's account and having lost the previous map you sent me.

Much love and good fishing - if there's any water? Mummy

DIBRUGARH.

The 25th. July, 1959.

Dear Mr. Macfurlong,

Let us say at the outset, that we are not known to one another face to face; but we have recorded your cognizance long ago without exception of Mrs. Macfurlong too; both of you are in the mirrors of our hearts - engraved. Your selfless activities done towards the cause of historical evolution of Charaideo, amidst other things, are very noteworthy contributions to our National interest. The picture of Charaideo is before your eyes: You are living in the heart and the buried neglected and forgotten history of Charaideo, appears to be enchanting to you.

We were willing to see you both at Charaideo, on our visits thereto on two or three occasions, but fortune appeared to have deprived us of the opportunity.

We have seen your article in the Sunday, Statesman dated the 19-7-59 under the caption "Bird God Hill" and read it with a biding interest.

We can not but appreciate your painstaking interest in this respect. Your article, undoubtedly, will invite attention from a very wide range of readers, who will at least realise the great importance of Charaideo. The article of course, contains some, omissions and commissions here and there, for which, we may prefer some writings - that too in appreciation of your works. Summarily you have done a very noteworthy piece of work by publishing the article.

We herewith send our hearty thanks and best wishes to you and Mrs. Macfurlong.

Kindly acknowledge receipt of our thanks and warm wishes.

Mr. Mac farlong,  
Manager, Charaideo Parbat  
Tea Estate.

Yours sincerely,

*S. Rajkumar*

( S. Rajkumar, S.D.O. Dibrugarh &  
President, All Assam Tai  
Historical & Cultural Society.

*A. Rajkhowa*  
*Advocate.*

( A. Rajkhowa, Advocate, Dibrugarh)  
& Vice President A.A.T.S.  
P.T.O.



I wonder what Iris thought about this letter which seems to ignore her as the author of the article but to concentrate on my father's part in allowing the excavation to go ahead at Cherideo.

Iris to Alan, 27th Aug 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I think you will have returned by now, and this letter will find you with the friend, the yacht (where?) at least I hope so.<sup>204</sup> So far we have heard nothing of your travels, I hope this is a good sign and doesn't mean that you lost your Traveller's Cheques on arrival, we are dying to hear how you fared though. I think you have probably sent a letter by sea mail.*

*Your wonderful birthday parcel arrived a couple of days ago, full of the most delicious surprises and a lovely letter, thank you very much for everything. The green eye shade is exactly what I want for my painting expeditions, and Donne of course I adore, and have always wanted. I hope you'll "do" him because he's a difficult poet and one you can read again and again, understanding a bit more each time. I was very touched at being compared to a violet by a mossy stone - at the moment bear more resemblance to the stone actually!*

*I was surprised you weren't complimentary about Wordsworth's "there was a roaring in the wind" which I always think a wonderful description of a lake district morning. "And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters" is a lovely line. My favourite of Wordsworth's sonnets is "The world is too much with us" perhaps because I agree with the sentiments. I liked your poem very much by the way, the one about the blue flower whose colours ran over the landscape, a most original idea. I will send you my latest verse in this, it only has two good lines I think, do you agree and which are they?!*

*What fun that you like poetry, so few people do, we shall be able to thrash it all out when I come home, though I am rather rusty on things like "conceits". Your exam papers struck us as being fearfully difficult, in fact we could not answer a single question between us, what is a "pass" by the way? I'm sure you'll have got through, does AS mean Advanced and Scholarship level?*

*We also liked your essay on "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting" very much, I would go further and say that not only do we carry our past round with us, but that every decision we have made has changed us, so that in fact we are our past. But then I don't believe that "I" am an unalterable lump of something who comes into life and goes out of it untouched by everything that has happened. I am not the same person I was ten years ago, and I'll be something different again in another twenty, so which is me? All very difficult, sometimes in a flash of understanding one has the answer, but it seems to slip out of reach of words.*

*Anyway, to more mundane topics, August is ending thank goodness, it's the worst month in Assam, excessively humid and full of leeches and mosquitos. The only compensation is that it's the month for planting the rice, and the whole countryside is transformed into a pale green sea.*

*We have put our colour film in and have taken quite a few pictures of the planting, Granny's present of a Cine film only arrived yesterday, just too late I fear, so I shall use it on Miranda.*

*I think I told you, we aren't going to the Manas after all, too expensive, I wonder if we shall ever get there again with the Chinese infiltrating into Bhutan. Nehru says he is going to defend Bhutan and Sikkim, but I don't see how as there isn't a single road of any description. If he hadn't alienated the Nagas they would be the best people to send. It's so awful to think of all these simple, charming people being over-run, and I fear we shall never make the expeditions we had planned to Gangtok.<sup>205</sup>*

*I met the Edyes on Monday at the film, and the colour film they took of the Manas has at last been traced, and they are bringing it over for us to see. I wonder how the one of the Lone Bull Buffalo, taken in the face of enormous dangers (Fiona!) has turned out.*

*I've got in a muddle with my letters and can't remember which of you I've told what. Not that there is a lot to tell, to-day there is due to be a strike on Mackeypore, Lakmijan and Gelakey and lots of military are standing by and everything is madly tense. Thank goodness its not here, but I don't think it ever would happen as Daddy has got everyone eating out of his hand.*

*Did I tell you about the pathetic skinny specimen of a dog I had rescued from the Rosses? One of their puppies which they had sent to the doctor Babu and he had returned it a couple of weeks later in the most shocking condition, and the Rosses had then lost interest in it and it was in a sort of chicken coop on the back verandah. Daddy and I were nearly sick and simply swept her (Tessa) up and to her home, where I've been plying her with milk and eggs, vitamins, iron tonics and love ever since. She is still terribly thin, but much better in every way. I'm afraid my opinion of the Rosses has gone down considerably, to be quite honest people like that shouldn't be allowed to keep animals. Dinah adores Tessa and they have terrific games, in which Miranda joins but I'm a bit nervous of her back legs which could split the dogs skulls if she really lashed out. So now my entire day is spent preparing bowls of food, de-ticking, walking and talking to my animals, not a bad way to spend it either.*

*I'm coming to the end of my book, three more chapters to write, then I want to put it away for several weeks before I start revising it. Have just finished a portrait of Ghansi the old chowkidar which I'm quite pleased with, have used a much bolder technique and it has quite a lot of life, even Dr Clarke our official artist said he liked it! So it'll take the place of the disgruntled mali on the wall in the drawing room. I'm running out of paints which is a pity as they're so expensive out here.*

*Nearly September, and the first signs of the cold weather will be appearing, and we shall get out our fishing rods, shan't be able to go on our first river trip till the end of October but the time flies by. I wish I was at home for it :*

*"Tell me not here, it needs not saying  
What tune the enchantress plays  
In aftermaths of soft September  
For under blanching mays,  
For she and I were long acquainted  
And I knew all her ways"  
(Housman - in case you thought it was me)*

*This seems to have been a very poetic and rather un-newsy letter, but I have been lazy about keeping up my diary lately. The only event this week has been the film on Monday "Campbells Kingdom" which was quite good.*

*By the way, I'm glad you saw the Dictator, I think that scene where Charlie Chaplin is swallowing all the sixpences is the funniest I've ever seen. We also went up to Moran club last week to see the film of the Bolshoi Ballet which was superb, Ulanova dancing the Dying Swan was quite wonderful.*

*I hope you're getting some sailing and that the summer is holding out, it seems too much to hope that it is.*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 12th Sep 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Hearty congrats on your exam results, a distinction for English was wonderful, we are telling everyone we meet about it. You deserved it after all your hard work, and we are frightfully pleased. Granny said in her letter "Alan has three passes, History, English and General" which as far as I can make out was all you took, or was "History with Foreign Texts" a separate subject? In which case do you have to take it again? I do hope not, as there's nothing so dreary as going back over the same ground again.*

*We haven't heard from you about it yet, I think the recent riots in Calcutta have disrupted the mail somewhat, hope too many letters weren't used to set fire to state buses. We were most relieved to hear you got back from your trip safely, and are longing to hear at more leisure which of the countries you liked best. Alas, only three of your postcards have so far reached us, the wretches in the post office have probably stuck them up on their walls, maddening.*

*Did you find yourselves speaking fluent French by the time you'd finished, and how were your feet? I hope you had some fine weather when your friend was staying with you and were able to explore the countryside a bit, also hope you passed your motorbike test. I hear David has gone one better and got a car, I must say I'd much rather you had one, perhaps if my book gets published!*

*Mid-September, and at last a slight break in the heat, or rather the humidity, we had two positive icy days last week (72 degrees) and the nights are much cooler. I've got a row of beans out and this time next month hope to be making our first sortie up the river. The Edyes are coming this evening with their films of the Manas which I believe are very good so I'm longing to-see them. I fear we shan't be able to get there much longer, they'll probably be making a main road up to Bhutan through it, with troops stationed all along the banks, slaughtering fish and animals, horrible thought.*

*I've heard from the Dr Babu that you only have to slip Rs.20 to a game warden at Kaziranga and you can poach a couple of barking deer, so I've changed my mind about sending Miranda there. She'll have to take a chance and stay here, the servants all adore her and she them, she does a dance for each mali who arrives in the morning. She is looking very sleek and glamorous these days, and has got over her silly behaviour and comes when I call, I shall hate leaving her.*

*Tessa, the Poodledor, is much better, though she still looks like a cross between a sheep and a langur monkey. She wears us out with her energy, we left her in the drawing room on Monday when we went to the club and she pulled out "Poultry Keeping for the East" and the dictionary and chewed great lumps out of them, I had put everything out of her reach but didn't think of the book case.*

*The film "Bell Book and Candle" was very good, awful nonsense, but fun.*

*On Tuesday there was the final of the local football league, played in three feet of mud and a herd of cows, I had to present the prizes and when I'd finished all the little boys sit on a bench beside me leapt up at the same moment and the bench fell onto my foot. It scraped all the skin off my shin and instep, luckily only grazed me as I think it could have broken my leg, it was a huge heavy thing. So the guest of honour hobbled off gasping with pain and bespattered with mud, typical.*

*On Sunday Daddy played in the medal round at golf and Dr Clarke and I painted a model, one of the "military" with a wonderful face (he is a Garo from the Shillong hills), we had great fun with his polished Mongolian face and springing blue-white hair, but when Daddy arrived he was horrified as it was the wrong model, and this was the C.O. of the military*



outpost and a very important man. It would have been fun if the Nagas had attacked while he was sitting on our verandah.

Jorhat is full of big brass I believe, I don't think anything will come of this scare but the Chinese will infiltrate and quite suddenly we shall find them among us. I was quite pleased with my portrait, I was painting on canvas for the first time and found it satisfying but quite different, the canvas sucks in the paint and changes it and every time you look at the picture it is different. Dr Clarke's was better but curiously lifeless, like marble.

Congrats, too on being a prefect I hope you won't have to plunge into more frenzied work, I'm not sure what the next stage in your programme is, a try for a scholarship next year I think. I must write to Mr Marriott and find out.

Must go and see how the cook's getting on, his hat was over one eye last time I saw him and his mouth hanging open. Much love from us both, Mummy

Iris to Alan, 19th Sep 1959 Cherideo

My dear Alan,

Well, you will all be back with your noses to the old grindstone again, simply chock full of sunshine and lots of nice memories, hope Granny isn't dead after all her organisation, but it will be the last holidays she will have to cope with. I haven't had a letter from you this week, but you will have been away I think, your forty-one page effort made up for it! Here we had the first cold weather mist this morning full of wonderful smells, river trips, oranges and evening fires. Of course it's heated up again now, and we shan't actually light a fire for another month, but still it revives us.

Amazing to think that this time last year we were planning your trip out, the time has simply fled past. I've never known a hot weather go so quickly. I have my passage booked for December 11th, I'd hoped to break the journey in Bombay and look at some Buddhist caves, but I find they are further away than I thought and so I shall do the usual tour of the New Market in Calcutta! I'm coming Air India. Poor Daddy is feeling gloomy at the thought of three months on his own, but if he gets too depressed he can come a month early.

We had the Edyes last week-end as I told you. We spent a quiet time, they didn't seem to want to do anything much, well it wasn't exactly quiet as they brought Brin, their poodle and he is very spoilt like Fi-fi. He spent his time flying at my dogs and all our meals were spent shouting at them and picking up our feet out of the way of their snapping jaws. Brin's tail is cut with a ridiculous pom pom at the end and Tessa tried to pull it off which added to the confusion, Brin also chased Miranda and she put down her head and charged after him, I wasn't very happy though I said she was just playing, I've never seen her do that before. In between all these excitements we sat and drank cold drinks and talked.

On Saturday evening they showed us their films of the Manas but we weren't very impressed, not nearly as good as our colour films. The famous buffalo looked like a black rock. Tim has masses of exposure metres and expensive gadgets but doesn't seem to have the knack of taking a good photo. We didn't say this naturally, gasped with admiration at every slide!

On Sunday morning we took them to the Suntok waterfall which was hot and smelly, and Celia nearly had a heart attack climbing up from it so you couldn't call it a very successful outing, but it gave us some exercise. I missed the most enormous Birdwing, the female which is about twice the size of the one I have, Daddy missed a blue peacock too which I haven't seen before, maddening.

We had a large curry and retired to bed till five, and while we were having our tea Dr Clarke, John Lampett and a Dr Laing blew in on their way back from the Dilly river so that took care of the evening. The Edyes left on Monday morning early, and I was pretty tired and

*slept in the afternoon, and didn't go to the club, Daddy went in to polo but he won't play Grand Title any more. I'm relieved as Daddy is too heavy to start falling about and I can't imagine anything more awful than having him laid up with a broken leg! Cappie will be back in a month and I shall be relieved to hand the horses back as they are an awful responsibility and the syces the most ghastly bunch of rogues.*

*I'm having a lot of "servant trouble" at the moment actually which is irritating, the young bearer seems to have rubbed everyone's backs up and they tell me he smokes all our cigarettes, cooks out of my saucepans and helps himself to anything he fancies, I don't know whether its true, once they decide to gang up against one person they will tell any amount of lies to get rid of him. I loathe scenes in the pantry every morning though, the cook positively froths at the mouth and I feel somebody will attack somebody else with the carving knife one of these days.*

*Wednesday and Thursday were the most fearful days as I had to attend two meetings, one in Sibsager and one here, each lasted four hours and consisted of nothing but speeches (including one from me, without any warning or preparation) The first meeting was about making Assamese the state language, the one on Thursday was in the local school and was to commemorate 'the birth and death day of Mohammed.*

*The chief speaker was the Muslim priest of the local mosque and was the most superb looking man, enormously tall with a grey beard and the most powerful face, like a prophet, positively magnetic. He gave a good speech on the Muslim religion, most of which I understood, but then all the children of the higher classes came and read essays through the microphone. Each essay was about twenty sides of closely written paper, and was intoned in a rapid sing song of which one couldn't catch a single word, they just went on and on until I thought I would scream. After that we had "speeches from the public" and all the old boys in the audience got cracking, none of them had any teeth but they all had plenty to say, I arrived at three and got back at quarter past seven, nearly comatose with boredom.*

*It never seems to worry them that anybody might be bored, anyway I've had my fill of meetings for a long time. I was encouraged to find I can understand a lot of what is being said, specially if they speak slowly, so perhaps my years of study is bearing fruit.*

*On Thursday evening we had Father Roland, the Catholic priest for the night, he is an Indian, a very nice, gentle, slightly pathetic little man. Not at all the character that Father Paul, the Italian priest is, but the government won't allow any more missionaries to come out here, so they are very short handed and Father Paul has to stay and look after the school. The Catholics do such wonderful work in their schools, they always carry away all the top prizes and degrees, that it seems rather short sighted not to allow them to go on with it .*

*Yesterday Veena Raj came up for coffee, she is off home to-morrow for six months, and is busy packing her fifty five saris. I think one of the reasons she is going is that she never gets a chance to wear them here, some of them are more or less solid gold I gather, and hardly appropriate in the club, she finds Assam very dull altogether and complains that there is nothing to do, wonder what she thinks the rest of us do all the time; Indian women never seem to be taught to sew or knit or have any hobbies which is so odd, they don't even wash or iron their clothes.*

*That brings us up to date, Saturday, Daddy has sent me up a dozen men so there is terrific activity in the compound, digging and cleaning and spraying, it only looks tidy on Saturday afternoons.*

*The beans I put in have all withered and died from heat and wet so I'm not going to plant anything more till after the Pooja on October 8th. The image is getting on well, it always makes me nostalgic for the time you were small and out here, never mind I'm getting rid of my sentimental broodings into my book which is nearly finished, only one more chapter. Nobody ever mentioned my article, did you ever get it? Tessa is slowly continuing to pick up,*

*Celia kept telling me how thin she was and why didn't I feed her up, which pleased me a lot as you can imagine. On the whole, though, Celia was more tactful than usual and we enjoyed having them.*

*Your marathon letter arrived on Monday and we were delighted with it as you can imagine, having only had some of your p.c's. You certainly had some grisly experiences, probably more amusing in retrospect, but it must have been quite an experience, and we're overcome with admiration at your even attempting it. We've neither of us seen any of the places you mention (except Zurich, from the air) how I envy you the Impressionist painters, I must see them one day. Thank you for taking the trouble to tell us about it in detail, will certainly prize your letter for ever! I'll write more about the "A" level in my next. Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 26th Sep 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letters, I also got some snaps from the Pooles, not very good ones but enough to show you're all in good shape. I have had a V. Tiring week, well two days of it I've been v. tired after a sleepless night. One was yesterday after going up to Moran the evening before to see "Gi-gi". The combination of late night, and coffee and curry puffs on the way home, finished me and I didn't close my eyes for the rest of the night. I also had a sore throat yesterday, the beginnings of a cold, so you can imagine felt absolutely suicidal, however I'm better this morning though streaming at the nose.*

*"Gi-gi" I think you've seen, anyway as you know its a lovely film, everybody in it just right, nice tunes, lovely costumes, the lot. I shall definitely like to see it again, so we must make a point if it ever comes anywhere near. I feel if it has got to Assam, Ambleside has a good chance! We went up with Dr Clark, Daddy had spent the day saying "What is this film Gi-gi that nobody's ever heard of" I kept telling him it was frightfully famous but he said he'd never heard of it so it couldnt be, however he enjoyed it as much as I did. Leslie Caron is delicious, it would be worth seeing just to watch her face.*

*Our own film this week was "The Prince and the Showgirl" which you probably know all about too, Marilyn Monroe in the same skin tight satin dress throughout, her side view was most peculiar, but I must say she acted quite well. Still I was a bit disappointed in it, it seemed to go on too long with the same joke.*

*I didn't sleep after that either. I took myself to the spare room after half an hour of listening to Daddy's snores, every time I told him to turn over he told me to turn over myself and other rude things, he swore next morning he hadn't remembered any of the conversation. Anyway I spent an extremely uncomfortable night being bitten by mosquitos and planning to run away to sea leaving sad little notes on the mantelpiece. Daddy was quite heartless about it all, he knows perfectly well that if I did start out to run away I would hurry back to give the dogs and Miranda their dinner!*

*On Saturday Daddy went in to tennis, but I made the excuse that I was making marmalade. Quite true actually, but I left the bearer to stir it while I took the dogs out and when I got back it was overcooked and has set into a lump of amber which you have to chip off with a hammer, I'd made it out of the grape fruit and oranges that were falling off the trees before they were ripe so I don't think it would have been very good anyway.*

*On Sunday Daddy played golf, and Dr Clark and I went painting, we did a view of water and rice fields and blue mountains half hidden by clouds, very difficult. It was a quiet village road but in three minutes we were surrounded by a vast crowd all hoiking and breathing garlic down our backs. At one stage a bus passed: and I said jokingly "I expect this will stop so that everyone can get out and see what we're doing" - and it did!*

*All the passengers poured out and surrounded us with loud cries of "Artist" and then went on to make comments in Assamese trying to decide what it was we were painting, they kept referring to Dr Clark as the old man, but luckily he doesn't understand Assamese. Daddy likes my painting but as usual I have managed to lose the lovely freshness of the original, I want to have one more bash at the rice, it is so lovely.*

*In the afternoon Moran came down to play Nazira at tennis and we went in to support it, most of Moran seem to be Indians these days, and they are very good tennis players, we only won one match. The last, a man's four, Ruaridh Ross and Tom Darby playing their two best men, was extremely good and never finished. It had got up to twelve eleven before the light went. With the last ball one of the Indian ladies got her glasses broken, but luckily without any damage to the eye. I do hope Pip is none the worse for his accident.*

*The animals are well, Miranda did what I have been expecting for a long time, this morning, crossed the cattle trap and was half way down the drive to the main road when I caught her. She wasn't trying to run away and followed me back quite meekly but tried to jump the cattle trap on the way back and fell into it instead, luckily without breaking a leg.*

*The malis are busy making a bamboo thing to put across the gate, but I can foresee fights with Daddy about "how am I expected to drive my Land Rover through, if you think I'm going to jump out every time" etc. I shall have to post a mali there ready to-spring into action. I've started to teach Tessa to retrieve, she is not as quick as Dinah was, but is beginning to get the hang of it, at first she just picked the slipper up and tossed it in the air and then raced back for her biscuit, but this morning she brought it back to me several times. Dinah, sits and looks on with a "for heavens sake let me show her" expression on her face, and occasionally can't bear it any more and fetches it herself.*

*We're having another hot spell, but this will be the last, I'm just longing for the afternoons when I can sit out in a deck chair instead of cowering in the Air Conditioned room.*

*I'm looking forward to hearing what your form master thinks about your next course of action, do you think I should write to Mr Marriott or wait till I come back and talk it over with him then? Dr Clark's son has done the opposite, got a Distinction in History when English is supposed to be his best subject. Have you thought of Journalism or Publishing as a career? Still, there's time to cross that bridge when it comes. It would be nice if you could work your way into some firm which would take my books! My book is a children's one, the story of a year on a tea garden, with folk tales "woven" in, terribly instructive, amusing, picturesque and esoteric (a word critics always bring in sooner or later) but alas I fear will not be accepted.*

*Daddy is just on the point of writing! Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 3rd Oct 1959 Cherideo*

*Dear Alan,*

*Another week flashed by, and now that we're in October the worst really is over. I feel a bit shaken at the moment, its only ten a.m. but it been one of those mornings. It started with a mad dog at breakfast, Dinah suddenly growled and we looked up to see it slinking into your room. Luckily the dogs came with me when I called them, but then Daddy had to go after it with his gun which quite put him off his meal.*

*Then just now I was training Tessa with her biscuits, when Miranda came along to see what was going on. She loves the dogs biscuits and when I wouldn't give her any more she started flying at both me and Tessa, she has jolly sharp teeth and feet and I got quite a fright (not to mention a small bite) and had to hit her over the head with the slipper and beat a hasty retreat, I was most upset as I don't know what I shall do with her if she gets vicious, I've heard that the males do but I thought she would be all right.*

*A few minutes later when I had recovered I went back and called her and she came running up and was perfectly calm and sweet. I shall have to keep her shut up if she does this again as it isn't fun and she might attack one of the malis. In fact its going to be one of those days altogether, as I have to attend a meeting at Sibsager College this afternoon and give a speech in Assamese, they only asked me yesterday and I haven't written the speech yet. Daddy is full of bright ideas as to what I should say, but I don't know the Assamese words for any of it. I always swear I'll never go again, but when these pathetic little appeals come I weaken.*

*Apart from all these alarms, its been a quiet week, and the last few days much cooler. On Wednesday Daddy had some work, to do in Seleng district so I went with him and had lunch with the Greenwoods<sup>206</sup> (don't think you know them.) They have a bungalow that makes Cherideo look like a matchbox, simply vast. It was quite a pleasant change, Beryl showed me their hens which they brought out from home, they paid £1 per egg and of the first lot of eggs only three hatched and of the second they only have six hens and with all the Air freight etc. they reckon they have cost £40! So far they haven't laid a single egg themselves. They also have a beautiful peacock which usually wanders about loose but had been shut up in the hen run as it was eating all the cauliflower and flower seedlings.*

*On the way back I stopped at the Rosses to have my hair cut, tried to do it in a new style with half the front piece coming down and half going up, it's not very successful but Daddy keeps saying it makes me look ten years younger which I don't know whether I consider a compliment or not. Bette was arranging a children's party and had several cakes in the oven so I don't think was very pleased to see me but took it well. Her own hair is a violent blond at the moment.*

*I spent the week end nursing my cold, which has quite gone now. Daddy went into polo on Monday, and found everyone in the depths of gloom and was glad to get away. There has been a lot of labour trouble at Mackeypore this week, John Darby has been chased several times, and when a police posse was sent there the labour surrounded it and the police simply fled. All Cappies fault really, but he's on leave this month, and Lumley Ellis too, incredible to think they have been gone nearly three months.*

*I've started on my seed boxes, I've put it off till the last possible moment as once the seeds are out of the packets and into the earth I never stop worrying about them. I always pretend I don't care whether they come up, but I don't fool even myself!*

*What else have I done this week? I've made a blouse (rather badly) and half painted a picture (very badly) and that about all.*

*I've been training Tessa for a few minutes each morning and she shows great promise, will now bring the slipper back and give it into my hand without any hesitation whenever I throw it, and that's the chief hurdle over. She has a good nose so when she quietens down will make a good gun dog I think, just when we've decided to give up shooting and Daddy is going to sell his gun.*

*I wonder how your election speech went off, and if you had any of those horrible moments of black out when not a single word will occur to you. Daddy was most impressed by your being a corporal which he never achieved, and you seem to have thousands of important jobs to do and I hope won't wear yourself out. Is the Trevelyan Scholarship an open one? Worth trying for anyway, though I suppose the competition is terribly stiff. When you get the money back from the H.M. we would like you to keep £5 for yourself as an "A" level reward, could go into a travel fund for future trips perhaps? Hope you do get it!!*

*Really must go and write my speech, sorry for a skimpy letter but will do better next week. Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 12th Oct 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is a couple of days late, as there have been no mails over the Pooja holidays. It finished yesterday (the Pooja) and poor Daddy is sorting out the drunken quarrels and split heads this morning, as he has a splitting head himself after a very late night and a cold coming he is not exactly in the mood for it.*

*We had a minor tragedy yesterday, both the cowmen were drunk and one of the cows took that opportunity of producing a calf, while out in the garden, and it was born dead. I don't know whether it had anything to do with the fact that she was out or not, but I think if she had been left quietly at home it might have been all right. Maddening as I've been waiting five months for this calf, the fact that it was a bull makes it slightly less so, but one way and another I've decided the cows aren't worth the trouble they give me and I'm going to sell them. Daddy and I drink so little milk it just doesn't make it worth while, specially as I have to leave them for months on end when I come home. Magi (the cowman you were so scared of) came in singing and shouting yesterday morning, and tottered off in the direction of the paddock, and about ten minutes later we heard the calf had been born, but as usual the story is terribly garbled. Any way, that is that.*

*The Pooja started on Thursday evening with a film in Assamese which we went down to see. I had lost my glasses and as we sat at least five hundred yards away from the screen I would only see a lot of faceless forms drifting about. And this didn't help me to understand what they were saying. However we sat on the verandah of the Head Mohoris house and he and his family gave us an uninterrupted running commentary of it all, it was the usual rather grim saga, about a little boy whose father forbids him to believe in god or utter his name, and when he refuses lashes the child with whips, tries to cut off his head, buries him alive, and throws him under the feet of mad elephants. Each time as one of those frightful things happened the figure of a god appeared in the clouds and all the coolies cheered as if it was the winning goal. Needless to say the wicked king met a sticky end when he ran out of torture. There were three films every night for three nights, ending at five in the morning, but we didn't attempt another, though my glasses came to light thank goodness. I had left them at the club, minus case, so it was a miracle they didn't get stolen or broken.*

*The lighted stalls and balloons and glass bangles were fun, we wished we had a flash attachment, but we took some Cine and colour films of the image yesterday when they were taking it away to throw it in the river. It was taken in procession with dancers and drummers and looked very gay, and was then loaded (rather an anti climax) onto the tractor to be taken to Suntok.*

*Yesterday evening we went to the Deopani Pooja which is the only one left where they have a dancing party. I was tired before we started, and we didn't go down to see the dancing till after eleven and got home at quarter past two. All the company was there, we went and had a buffet supper with the Rosses first and I was nearly asleep by the time the dancing started. It was quite good, but nothing special, Manipuri girls doing the same dances as always and singing long songs in nasal voices, the best part was the drumming.*

*On Friday I was lying down after lunch, feeling tired again (seems to be a fairly normal condition with me these days) when I suddenly remembered I'd promised to go and see the secretary of the school who lives in that village where the dotty old man showed us his scent factory. Flung on some clothes and collected a driver and got there to find the whole family dressed in puce silk with flowers in their hair, so thank goodness I didn't forget completely as they had obviously made a thing of it and collected all the relations for miles round.*

*There were about six little girls, all ravishing, their father is that funny little man who came to see Daddy the night we had the fire in the paddock and there was a storm, do you remember? He is hideous and I can't think how he produced such lovely children as his wife*



*is tall and toothy and bespectacled. It was a bit of a sticky afternoon, with long pauses in the conversation and some horrible efforts on my part to fill them with Assamese phrases. They have a lovely view from their house though, which I plan to go and paint one day this week, sparkling rice fields stretching up to the hills. After tea two of the little girls sang Assamese songs, looked sweet sitting on a bench with their hair ribbons nodding, - wished I'd taken my camera. I managed to get past the scent factory safely, though saw the dotty old man looming.*

*On Saturday morning Dr Clark brought a couple of friends who were staying to have morning coffee and look at the burial mounds, Daddy pushed off to play golf and left me to cope with them all, plus a little girl who adored all the animals but I had to spend my time saying "Don't touch pussy" "I shouldn't stroke the deer" "You'd better not bend over that little dog", "Keep away from his back legs dear" until she finally said plaintively (pointing at Tessa) "This is my only friend in the bungalow". They were a nice couple, and seemed to enjoy staring at the humps of grass, though we got a bit lost on the garden and I was glad to get them all safely home. Daddy arrived back at about one, just as they were leaving!*

*On Monday the film was "Desiree", which I was looking forward to but was very bored with, the book was very good but Marlon Brando in an enormous three cornered hat didn't really look very like Napoleon and everyone else talked in strong American accents and nothing happened. As history it was nonsense and as a film it was just dull.*

*On Friday spent the day listening to the election results, quite exciting to begin with but then it was obvious what was going to happen. I must say I'm pleased the Gaitskell crowd didn't get in, they are all so peculiar. At least we know where we are with this crowd. It must have been even more exciting on the T.V. I see the gorgeous Geoffrey J-Smith is in.<sup>207</sup>*

*That seems to be my week, I've spent quite a lot of it poring over my seed boxes, everything is coming up but this is the stage when Miranda or ants will eat them. Miranda has been perfectly friendly and sweet since the biting episode, but I keep a wary eye open for her change of moods. We are taking some cines of her, she is very sleek and elegant.*

*Tessa is getting on well with her training and will sit while I throw the slipper and then bring it back when I tell her, but she is pretty wild in other ways, eats everything in her path and the bungalow is strewn with half chewed toilet rolls and lumps out of the bear rug.*

*As you're so busy, we shan't expect a letter every week, once a fortnight will do! Wonder what sort of a rugger team you have this year, 1st XV I mean. What day do you break up? Much love from us both - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, 19th Oct 1959 Cherideo*

*My dear Alan,*

*A beautiful October morning, but still warm, day temperature is now about 84 and the night one 71 and everyone is getting colds and flu, including Daddy. "I never get a cold" he was saying all the time I had mine, but has just had a snorter and is still coughing a bit, needless to say he felt very sorry for himself but refused to go to bed. Strange how we keep well through the heat and sicken the minute the weather improves.*

*I've spent a lot of this week head down in the garden, and the malis erecting bamboo fences around all the seedlings I'm planting out so that Miranda won't eat them. Everything seems to be coming up except parsnips which I've never tried to grow before, as I shan't be here to see or eat any of it I haven't quite the interest that I usually have which is rather selfish. Anyway Daddy always tells me of the wonderful sweet peas, vast cauliflowers etc, he grows when I'm not there.*

*I've started sitting out in the summer house in the afternoons but looked up yesterday and saw that the main beam holding all the other beams up had been eaten by white ants, and the*

entire roof was about to fall on my head, so I've got to get something done about that. I've finished my book and am now going through it crossing out all the "very" and unsplitting the infinitives, I can't decide whether it is wildly amusing or deadly dull, I fear the latter. Never mind, it has kept me amused through the hot weather.

On Friday I had Nita over for the day which I enjoyed though she never stopped talking from ten until six when she left. Still it was quite amusing talk, she told me all about her interview with Nehru when she was trying to get Jocelyn off being expelled from the country. She told me this in the greatest confidence, and didn't want it to get back to the Daily Express, you can imagine the sort of article they would publish: "Save my son" pleads raven-haired mother, of Prime Minister Nehru. Dramatic dash to Delhi of devoted Mrs Rigby..." etc etc. So don't pass it on to anyone who might have anything to do with the press! Anyway she didn't tell me very much except that she had coffee with Nehru and that he was very charming and sympathetic and squeezed her arm afterwards and told her not to worry which I thought was remarkable for a man as busy as he is, to spare the time to see her at all in fact. I can't imagine anyone except Nita even suggesting such a thing! Jocelyn had absolutely nothing to do with anything, only happened to be sharing a bungalow with the lad who did.

I can't remember what we talked about for the other six hours, but when she left we had to have a bath and meal and go down to watch some dancing in the temple in honour of the goddess Lakshmi (goddess of prosperity). As usual we wished we had a flash camera to take pictures of the priest sitting in a cloud of incense in front of the image, chanting Sanskrit verses and rubbing holy oil on the heads of the women who came for his blessing. He blessed us too which was kind of him and gave us a plateful of coconut and oranges which unfortunately he sprinkled with the same holy oil he was rubbing on the women's heads otherwise I would have eaten it.

Afterwards we watched the dancing for about an hour and enjoyed it, it was all done by the coolies, sort of folk dancing, and one or two of them were very good, one particular one who did a dance with a bow and arrows trying to shoot an imaginary bird was terribly realistic. There was the usual funny man who imitated animals, and kings with tin swords fighting devils with tin swords, both lots of swords getting rather bent in the process. I would have enjoyed it more if I had felt fresher.

On Saturday I fell asleep after lunch which I practically never do, Daddy woke me at half past three to say that one of my Assamese friends was waiting to see me. I crawled out of bed and tottered out with pillow-creases on my cheeks, and found it was one of the Sibsager College students, a very earnest young man. He sat himself down in an armchair and asked me whether I preferred Marx to Kant, and which of T.S. Eliot's poems I thought best. I said the "Waste Land" which is the only poem I know of his and he looked scornful and said what did I think of Hegel, who was his favourite writer. I was just shaking the sleep out of my head and trying to remember who Hegel was when Daddy saved the situation by striding in dressed for tennis and saying we must leave straight away. I thrust a couple of Penguin Books of poetry into his hands and said I hoped he'd come and talk about Hegel some other day, but I hope he doesn't because I still shan't know anything about the gentleman.

Tennis was at the B.B. and the last before the Lumley Ellisses get back, they arrive on Wednesday. All the home leavers will be back within the next couple of weeks, Pooles, Davises etc. Peggy Davis had a nasty experience, she was Hoovering and leant out to open the window which had a steel frame and formed an electric circuit, so that she was glued to the window and the Hoover with currents flowing through her. Luckily her children were about and unplugged her, otherwise it would probably have been fatal, but she was burnt and badly shocked. So it shows how careful one should be with electric gadgets. Apparently she will hardly turn on a light switch now, she is such a nervous wreck.

*Yesterday we had a Dr Laing over for lunch, he is an amusing person, has travelled over most of the world and talks about it entertainingly, though I sometimes think he exaggerates and piles on the drama. He was talking about his experiences on the Amazon and how two of the crew rowed to the shore in a canoe and it capsized and they were immediately eaten by pirana fish, just simply gobbled up before anyone could rescue them which seems a little far fetched. He is just off to the south sea islands so will have another crop of tall stories to amuse us with if he ever comes back. There is something about being a doctor, you can always get a job wherever you happen to be.*

*We are going up to the Edyes this week end and hope to do our first bit of fishing on their rather mouldy little river, the following week-end of Daddy's birthday we have arranged to go the Lakmijan basha (where we went with the Pooles after that fearful party) and try to get beyond the mine for the first fishing on the Dekko, this is the best time of year as long as we don't get any more heavy rain. I don't mind about the fishing anyway, I'm just longing to get on the river again.*

*We were delighted to hear of the letter from the Lancashire E.C.,<sup>208</sup> I'm sure Mr Marriott will be able to pull some strings and get a place for you. I read in the papers that a party of boys had arrived to spend a year in Indian schools prior to going to a university, does the idea appeal to you? The Arts Council arranges it, it might be an "experience". We were most amused by your election meeting, and you seem to have stunned the audience with your speech. Also were delighted with the news you had played for the 2nd XV, in fact are quite overwhelmed with how well you are doing at everything. How's the guitar? I like the Tom Dooley boys latest.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 2nd Nov 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*I think Daddy got the letters this week to thank you for - though you'll probably have to wait some time before he does! We managed to go up the river for his birthday, or rather we went up to the basha that evening and spent the night. The day before had been pouring wet and it was still cloudy on Saturday morning, but at two o'clock the sun came out so we sprang into action, the cook and I hurling cold potatoes and kerosene into boxes while Daddy stood and said don't know how you think that's all going into the boot of the car! However it did, though we seemed to need as much for one night as for a week.*

*The basha was the same, except that the two rather sweet dogs there have had a puppy, the roundest, most adorable thing you've ever seen, we were so thankful you weren't any of you there to insist that we brought it home. We got there at half past five to find the river very high and no boatmen, however they turned up, and we settled down very quickly with a bottle of rum in front of the fire.*

*When the rum was finished (we gave half to the boatmen) we ate curry puffs and the stew the cook had made the day before and fell into our camp beds in our clothes. The three dogs were with us, and at about two in the morning we were woken with the most tremendous sucking noises which we thought was them opening our tin of sausages and polishing them off. However it was only the puppy sucking from its mother, but from then on Daddy was terribly restless and what with him creaking on his camp bed and an elephant (tame) trumpeting in the jungle outside I didn't get very much more sleep either.*

*Daddy was up with the first streak of light boiling the kettle for tea, and it looked as if the weather had cleared, but by the time we were frying our eggs and bacon clouds had come up and in fact it started to rain while we were having breakfast. Dr Clark came to join us and*

*we discussed what we should do, and decided to risk it and set off in the boat as soon as it cleared.*

*The river was tremendously full and powerful and it took ages to make any progress, and we had only got just beyond the first island when it started to rain again. I clambered out and stood under some banana leaves which dripped down my neck, and the outlook was not very bright. However the shower moved on and although it stayed cloudy we got no more rain. Needless to say as soon as we arrived back at the basha at 4 p.m. the sun came blazing out, and has been shining ever since. We didn't get up to any good fishing water, but Daddy caught a small fish and we got several bites in the first stretch by the island. If the sun had come out I think we'd have caught something big as they were obviously hungry but the water was just too muddy.*

*I hardly fished at all, but in my few casts got one bite that bent my trace. Dr C. painted and had a swim but I didn't do anything except read and sleep, and after our picnic lunch we only went a little further and then decided it was too much for the boatmen and simply whirled home in about five minutes. Boiled up a kettle and sunned ourselves for the first time while we drank our tea, not a wildly successful stay in terms of fishing and we saw no animals, but it was lovely to be by the river again and I feel much refreshed to-day.*

*We got home to find the bungalow still standing and the animals all on their feet and the cook sober, all rather surprising. It was Dewali on Saturday, the festival of lights, and they had decorated the cow house with little saucers full of lighted oil, very pretty but I was sure the cows would have gone up in smoke. We have sold them (cows) and they are going to-morrow, I feel sad in a way but they really aren't paying for themselves at the moment and things always seems to go wrong while we are away.*

*I'm keeping Miranda in the paddock most of the day now as she is a perfect menace in the compound, she thinks the little bamboo fences I've erected round my seedlings are specially for her to practise deer-jumps over, and all my beds are full of broken plants and hoof marks. Poor Daddy isn't going to have much in the way of flowers this year, what with all this heavy rain and Miranda. The vegetables are coming on well though and he will have far more than he can possibly eat. He (Daddy) went up to Jorhat on Wednesday and met somebody who is longing to have Miranda if we want a home for her, so that is a comfort.*

*The trip to Jorhat was about polo ponies, a bid to keep polo going AT ALL COSTS - vast sums of money are to be spent in sending Peter Cruden and someone else down to a big fair in south India somewhere, to buy new horses. Wish someone would decide to keep us going at all costs! There are already people going round muttering that of course only senior managers will get the good horses, so I can foresee all sorts of lovely fights developing, which we shan't be involved in thank goodness. Cappie comes back this week and, then the fun will really start.*

*I went to spend the day with Nita on Thursday and Goughie kept appearing and saying "Ought to put their names in a hat, what? Willy nilly, what?", this was about the polo ponies as I discovered after he had said it two or three times. Nita and I had both taken sleeping pills the night before, and were consequently very dopey and after lunch I went to bed and stayed there till 4 p.m. dozing and reading her magazines. It was a nice peaceful day, as it drizzled and we couldn't even go out for a walk.*

*Nita has the Gussel Brown's poodle, I don't know if you remember it when we went to lunch there, it was the most pathetic thing, cringing and thin and matted. Now it is in the most beautiful condition with a string of blue beads round its neck and some of Nita's scent on its fringe, of course she doesn't want to give it back and we can neither of us bear the idea of it going back to its neglected state. Really its awful being fond of animals in a country like this, Dinah and Candy seem to have made up their quarrel, though I keep them shut up apart when I'm out.*

*That's all the news, except that we've lighted our first fire, in fact the weather is now perfect and the oranges are cheap so I spend every spare minute sitting in the sun eating fruit. We should have been going up the Manas with Robert Shaw this week, never mind we shall go another year if the Chinese are not in residence by that time.*<sup>209</sup>

*The Corps are back but there is some talk of them moving off again soon, Lavender is crouching over pots of plants looking more witch-like than ever and muttering curses about the powers that be, she has spent her hot weather filching things from other peoples' gardens and now doesn't know what to do with them, serves her right. She has the most beautiful orchid out at the moment, the Blue Vanda, I really must collect some more orchids when I come back.*

*I hope you managed to avoid relegation after all – at Rugger I mean. Sad that I shall arrive back too late to see you play in any team. I wonder what Mike Doogan is going to do with himself, I'm sorry to hear about his family's troubles, didn't know his father was re-marrying actually.*

*Must get this off, everyone is panting for lunch.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 9th Nov 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*No letters this week, probably due to Nazira P.O and nothing to do with the non-writing of them by you! Incredible to think that I shall just be starting out this time next month, it's going to be a terrific jump from the warm emptiness of life here to mid-December in England, do hope I don't collapse with flus and things straight away. Also that I don't get held up by fog. I find I'm on a fast service that only stops at Cairo and Rome so will reach London, or should, at mid-day on Sunday. This will leave me time to be hours and hours late, and also to see Robert. I don't know his present address actually but will be writing to Granny the day after to-morrow - will you tell her.*

*I suppose you are all in a whirl of Christmas preparations except that we none of us have any money this year! Out here there's absolutely no sign of Christmas at all, and the great topic of conversation is where everyone is going to be moved to. Cappie's leave has been extended a month which has led to a lot of wild speculation as to whether he will come back at all, if he doesn't it means that Daddy will have to organise all the cold weather polo as he is vice-captain which doesn't please him at all. It'll give him something to do as long as he doesn't get roped into playing! The Pooles got back on Saturday, I haven't seen them yet but I gather Tom is enormous to Daddy's great delight, Daddy has lost nearly a stone in weight this hot weather.*

*Rain this morning, after a long dry spell, which is nice for the garden. My vegetables aren't as successful as last year, good peas and tomatoes but not so good carrots and lettuces, however Daddy should have plenty and will be able to live on strawberries. I'm having to keep Miranda in her run most of the time now as she loathes the paddock and can get through the holes in the wire, which she does and then minces round eating every flower and planting her pointed feet on the new seedlings and snapping them. Poor Miranda, it's hard on her but there is a limit to what I can stand, the only thing is to enlarge her present run I think and let her stay in it.*

*I have yet another dog - for a fortnight - Tessa's mother Sherry, the Ross's poodle. They've gone to Shillong on local leave and brought her round on Wednesday, she is like a sheep with a coat so thick and tangled you can hardly see her shape, such a shame as she would be a lovely dog. I thought of getting some clippers and making her look like a poodle but Daddy thinks the Rosses would be offended. She is a sweet dog, very quiet and well behaved, she*

*and Dinah make rude remarks at each other out of the corner of their mouths when they pass, but Dinah is too much of a coward to take on anything her own size.*

*We also have a new vehicle, a brand new Jeep in place of the Land Rover, lovely Dunloppillo seats etc. but much less room for the dogs and taking them all out in it is a hysterical business. Dinah pretends she can't get in or out and they all fall about in the back as there isn't enough room for them to stand up on the seats, we have to take them out in relays now. I felt rather sad to see the Land Rover go, silly how one gets attached even to a car.*

*We spent a quiet Sunday yesterday, butterfly-hunting and reading Eric Stanley Gardner, Vibhu Raj sent us up a lurid selection. The tea-seed nursery is flowering at the moment, and is a humming mass of bees and butterflies, we saw (but didn't catch alas) the large blue and orange Oakleaf, and a very rare purple butterfly that even Dr Norman hasn't got. We caught two beautiful Lacewings and a couple of others, I shall go and spend a morning there this week, and take a tin of golden syrup with me to smear on the trees - and no dogs.*

*In the evening Dr Clark called and said good-bye. he is leaving to-day but coming back next year to take a job in Jorhat. A nice old boy and I've enjoyed painting with him. On Thursday evening he persuaded us to go for a supper picnic to Gargaon palace. The very thought of doing such a dotty thing kept Daddy muttering all day, but actually it was fun. John Lampett came too and we climbed to the very top. Not quite so bad at night as one couldn't see the drop, but I didn't enjoy the last flight of steps, crawled up on my hands and knees and then sat down on the ground quickly while the men perched themselves on the parapet and gave me fits.*

*There was a bright moon and a thick mist and it was like being at sea except that the air was warm and jackals were howling, we wished we had taken you there, just the place for a spot of skiffle and I'm sure the old Ahom ghosts would have joined in. We drank Quantities of soup and ate curry puffs and John told us about his leave in Ceylon, he thought it was the most wonderful place and it certainly sounds it from his descriptions, wonderful tropical beaches, ruins, wild mountains, fish, the lot. I wish we could go and plant tea there, but the tea is the worst part of it and the political situation very unsettled.*

*John stayed with Auntie Jean's sister and her husband, (who do plant tea there), small world what? I don't know whether it was the cold mist or the curry puffs but I had a tummy upset the day after this picnic, and felt very cold and tired and low generally. We were supposed to be going down to a theatrical show in the evening, but just couldn't face it. It was given by some outside company and had a real film star in it apparently, I was woken up periodically by the sound of shots which I thought at first was the Nagas attacking but decided in the end must be part of the drama.*

*Talking of drama, we had a good film on Monday "Chase a Crooked Shadow", a thriller which took at least twenty years off my life with the sudden shocks and had a most surprising ending. I won't tell you as you might see it one day. Before the big film we had three long news reels, two long cartoons and one very long shortie, so we didn't get home till quarter past twelve, in fact seem to have had a lot of late nights this week, with the Highams to dinner on Thursday. Well, three late nights, but too much for old fogies like us.*

*On Friday morning I went down to the school with some paints and bits of wool and cardboard which I had got ready for the children to do handwork. They are pathetically eager to use them, but the teachers are so hopeless, the crayons I took down two months ago have only been used once. As there are a hundred children in the school it would be a whole time job to try and organise proper handwork classes, perhaps I will when I come back.*

*I have been starting to sort through things, which involves reading through all my old letters and then putting them back, can't bring myself to tear them up. Daddy doesn't want me to pack anything away, so there really isn't much to do. Daphne Meredith told me she was*



*putting everything except two plates and two spoons away before she left, poor John, he was protesting but Daphne wanted to so that was that. She is leaving four days before on the Comet, Daddy will probably come home Boeing as Air India is getting some.*

*If and when you get the money out of the H.M. will you ask him to make a cheque out to Granny for the amount? Daddy was delighted with your birthday letter, we must certainly try and do a tour next summer, doubt if shall be able to afford Ireland this time but I'll look into fares etc when I come back, I would also like to see it. It depends if you are finishing school, starting university or what have you, when will you be taking your scholarship? All my decisions seem to depend on something else which depends etc etc. ad infinitum, but no doubt it will all suddenly CLICK. Have you any special want for Christmas apart from a Jaguar, HI FI or fully fitted caravan?!*

*My letters do seem dull, but I do little else but revel in the climate and eat oranges. We hope to go up the river again next Sunday, the Corps went yesterday but caught nothing, the water was still v. high.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 16th Nov 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, only two more from me I reckon, incredible isn't it? I'm not doing anything about packing yet, just resting and lapping up as much sunshine as I possibly can in case I don't see it again for four months. The weather is perfect now, well just as it was when you were out, too hot by your standards I suppose but bliss for us.*

*We picked our first dish of beans this morning, and when I'm not eating oranges I'm drinking juice, oh if only it was like this all the year round - but I suppose we wouldn't appreciate it, and the tea wouldn't grow of course, so we wouldn't be here at all.*

*Talking about tea, Daddy has had had a hair raising few days in the factory with a breakdown of some terribly important bit of machinery which meant that he had to stop manufacturing for a couple of days and when he wasn't head down in pistons he was doing little sums as to how much per hour he was losing.*

*There was one nasty moment, Daddy walked into the factory just in time to see an enormous bit of iron shafting begin to crack and sway, he gave a yell and the man who was standing underneath leapt, there was a roar and a crash and a cloud of dust and for a few seconds nobody knew whether the wretched man was underneath it or not. They rushed forward and found him lying prone and unconscious, but only with shock fortunately, the shaft had bitten six inches into the solid cement of the floor where he had been, so he would simply have been mashed to pulp.*

*Poor Daddy suffered from shock himself for about half an hour afterwards, but the little man recovered and thoroughly enjoyed sitting up in bed in hospital regaling his friends with stories of his escape. Really its surprising there aren't more accidents with all those gnashing monsters whirling round, and only a handful of people with the slightest clue about them. Anyway after a couple of days the new bit was hoisted up without further scares and all is now back to normal, though manufacturing stops on December 4th.*

*I've been down to the school twice this week for handwork sessions, the second time was awful as all the masters except one were away, and he had to look after both schools with the result that he left me alone with a hundred children all yelling simultaneously for more wool, more paint, scissors, clay and what have you. After nearly an hour five woolly balls, two paper balls, some repulsive book markers and three hideous clay bananas emerged from the chaos. It's quite impossible to cope with so many children, a pity as they are very quick to pick up what is wanted, and extremely good with their hands.*

*One day perhaps I'll start a small, "model" school on the lines of the ones at home -perhaps! The trouble is that having educated the children there is then nothing for them to do except pluck tea leaves and they're too grand for that. Much better to leave them alone with their bows and arrows if you ask me.*

*Yesterday, Sunday, Daddy and I had lovely day up the river, fishing quite hard up to that place we went to with the Pooles, but catching not a thing. Daddy got a few bites, and we saw quite a few, but for some reason (full moon? atmospheric pressure?) they weren't taking. Actually I think the military and the people at the mine are doing a lot of trapping and ruining the river for fishing, but in every other way it was perfect, the water green and warm, the rapids full and flashing in the sun, birds and butterflies glinting etc etc. I lay like a hippo in the water before lunch, on the edge of a rapid where the water was warm, and then dried off eating a jolly delicious curry followed by oranges, chocolate a cigarette and a short sleep.*

*The basha is being done up as Tony Yeates is going to spend the cold weather in it, he is moaning about it being cold and unfit to live in, can you imagine it, with that river running past your door, he must be mad.*

*We went in to the Pooles for a bath and change before the evening service, Kathleen is still rather coldy and both are very depressed without the children. They found they (George and Jimmy) were a year behind with their work, George at thirteen should be taking his Common Entrance this year but apparently hasn't a hope of passing which is worrying for them. It doesn't do to keep boys out here too long, I don't know what the Corps are going to do with Timmy. He came back on Friday, and the next day Daddy took him and Ray up to see if the military were still guarding the back road to the river through Suntok. (They were, alas, even more so.)*

*I went with them as far as the tea seed nursery, plus the four dogs and my butterfly net, you can imagine the scrum in the jeep. We were disgorged quite quickly and spent an hour or so not catching butterflies, the flowers have fallen and apart from some tawny tigers and rather battered swallow tails there is nothing left. I had taken a book and oranges and would have enjoyed a peaceful time lying in the sun if it hadn't been for the dogs who kept breathing all over me saying "What shall I do now", sitting on my chest, starting fights in the region of my left ear, and generally being a nuisance.*

*I am not enjoying having four of them, they set each other off and yesterday when we were out for the day I had to leave complicated instructions for them to be shut up in relays, and then worried that the wrong two would be shut up together and I should come back to find Candy's ear in one room and Sherry's tail in another. Actually I doubt if they would fight without me there, as its jealousy that is the cause of it. Kathleen is now going to take Tessa when we're on leave, and I'm going to ask Dr Emmett to take Dinah (Trapper's owner, do you remember him?) and he can cope with the puppies if there are any. I hate breeding dogs, I can't bear seeing the puppies go and never feel they will be properly looked after so I would much rather not have to suffer agonies over Dinah's.*

*Thank you for that address about the literary competition, I'll certainly have a bash for the five hundred pounds, though I don't think you would call my book fiction strictly speaking, nor is it the least like E. Nesbit, and I think the age group would be 8-11 - however at least it will get a chance of being read which is more than can be said for a lot of first efforts. I've noted your ideas about presents, doubt if we can rise to a banjo at the moment, depends how much they are. You and the boy-next-door<sup>210</sup> will get on well as he is very musical apparently and plays several things, you might join the Kendal musical society which gives very good weekly concerts I believe. So typical that you are the only one we never had taught the piano! Between you you should start a local skiffle group, call yourselves the Hawkshead Hotpoints*

*or Wordsworth Wide Boys, and make lots of money playing at the local hops. I wish I could bring home a couple of the local drummers, they'd make the place hum.*

*Not a newsy letter but my days are pretty peaceful at the moment, purposely as I'm trying to store reserves of energy to draw on next month!*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, 24th Nov 1959 Cherideo

*My dear Alan,*

*Just a month till Christmas, this time next month I shall be standing chopping up brussel sprouts with snow (or sleet or rain or fog?) outside and at least one child in bed with something or other! Impossible to realise when here the sun is blazing down and sparrows nesting in the eaves and nothing happening much at all. How I'm looking forward to log fires and Telly and skiffle sessions - and trying not to think about chilblains. Daddy is trying to devise some sort of boots with electric wires running up my legs but I feel it would end with everything going off with a bang. I do hope we get a nice cold winter all the same with some skating on the tarns, I've never seen the tarns frozen yet.*

*We had our week-end with the Edyes and enjoyed it, at least the river trip on Sunday up the Jhanzie, a small river I've never been up before. It's about half the size of the Dekko but very pretty and Daddy caught one fish, a Sal of about two and a half pounds. They are jolly good eating, but when I said to Celia when we were leaving "I think you ought to keep the fish" she said "Thanks very much I will" and removed it forthwith which was a bit of a swiz. None of the rest of us caught anything, I didn't fish much as Daddy used my rod most of the time and also I had to hold Bryn the poodle whom Celia insisted on taking and then spent the day saying "For goodness sake keep that dog out of my way". Actually I didn't mind as the river was full of snags and I was quite happy just sunbathing and lolling in the boat.*

*Daddy and I were both pretty tired after staying awake most of the night lying on hard beds listening to the whine of mosquitoes, rumble of trains, howling of cats and after some hours the crowing of Celia's cockerels. We couldn't put on the light and read as there was no electricity and finally fell into a distracted doze at four thirty to be woken a couple of hours later by the bearer bringing early morning tea.*

*On Saturday afternoon Celia had arranged a tennis party for us which Daddy enjoyed but was a bit boring for me, however I looked round the compound and noted with pleasure how much further ahead my peas were and with sorrow how much better her carrots looked. On the way there we dropped Sherry at the Rosses, they had just got back from Shillong and were looking very brown and well, Bette clutching bundles of battered-looking orchids which she assured me were wonderful. Sherry was quite ready to jump into the car and go on with us which was a bit embarrassing, she was a sweetie but life is much less worrying without her and Dinah constantly being on the verge of leaping at each others throats.*

*We didn't stay to the film on Sunday evening but got back here in time for supper and the relief of our own comfortable beds. I found everything much the same, I always feel I've been away for weeks and expect the tomatoes to have ripened in my absence even though they weren't even flowering when I left. I'm picking lots of beans though and we've had our first lettuce - this probably is awfully boring to you but after six months without anything except a few tired veg. from Shillong it's the main topic of conversation here.*

*We enjoyed the film last Monday, "Carmen Jones" a negro version of the opera Carmen. A lot of people thought it terrible (terrible people most of them!) but we thought it very fresh and the singing was lovely, Harry Bellafonte sang beautifully and looked gorgeous most of the time, like polished mahogany, he only seemed a bit ridiculous in the last scenes when he kept rushing up and down stairs with a hat on. Pearl Bailey was terrific singing "Beat out*

*that Rhythm on a Drum" and there was a wonderful boxing episode. Altogether a very refreshing and unusual film.*

*Afterwards we got together with the Highams trying to think up decorations for the club "spree" and it turned into quite a party and I regret to say we were the last people to leave the club, with Robert Higham playing the "brushes" on the overseas Daily Telegraph. Needless to say we made no progress with the decoration side of it. The spree is in three weeks time and nobody seems to have the faintest idea of what is happening, how much food to get, who is in charge and how many, people to expect - quite typical. The trouble is that Cappie isn't here to organise us, there are strong rumours that he isn't coming back at all, and even wilder rumours as to why, but I wouldn't be surprised to see him turn up again. We would miss him, in spite of his steam roller methods, he had a kind heart and did get things done most of the time (except that ghastly children's party last year, when he promised elephants, merry go rounds, bumper cars etc. do you remember, and met us in Nazira bazaar without any of anything when we were on our way in to the party, lord it makes me quite ill just thinking of it). Anyway it now seems that Daddy will have to run the polo for the spree which fills him with gloom but it will give him something to think about as its on the day after I leave. How smug I shall feel winging my way across India in a Viscount and thinking of them all tearing about trying to have a good time.*

*I had a fright with Miranda this week as some silly ass left the gate open and she got out. I didn't notice her absence for a bit and then searched the compound for her before I realised she had escaped. She hadn't gone far luckily, but was happily munching away in thick jungle near the path and had no desire to come home. After about half an hour of cooing and waving dog biscuits in front of her I persuaded her back, but I don't feel very happy about leaving her. I'm trying to get Daddy to enlarge her run so that she can stay in it all the time.*

*Our Cine and still films are both back, and from what we can see without projectors are rather good, there are shots of Miranda on both and some of the Pooja and some I took of the rice planting which consist of enormous expanses of sky with a tiny strip of green at the bottom and minute pin point buffaloes in the middle. I never seem to be able to judge exactly what I'm taking. We were pleased the Cine had come out as the film stuck and Daddy nearly chucked the whole thing away.*

*Poor Daddy is having a bad day as his tractor has turned turtle in a drain and they can't get it out and even when they do it will be pretty damaged, just in the middle of some vital work. He has a lovely new machine that pulls out old tea bushes like a dentist's pliers pulling out teeth.*

*I'm sorry one of my letters went astray, I certainly write every week. Yes, I love Saki's short stories, very amusing and very sad too, the one about the little boy who plans to murder his aunt with a weasel (was it?) anyway its a terribly sad story. His people were out here and he was left like Kipling, for most of his childhood, like you up to a point, but they seemed to be abandoned for years with dreadful people. Have you read "Baa Baa Black Sheep" by Kipling, its the saddest story I've ever read. "The Loved One" I thought was one of the funniest books I've read, I laughed myself sick. Have you tried E.M.Forster? "Passage to India" is wonderful, but maybe you aren't quite ready for it.*

*Did Granny tell you that Mrs Morris met Fiona and told her she had heard from her son that you had made a brilliant speech at the election debate - we thought you must have though you were so modest about it! Maybe you'll end up with Robert in the H of C,<sup>211</sup> wonder how his book is selling, I see the same publishers have brought out "Lolita" so poor old Randolph<sup>212</sup> will be forgotten I fear.*

*One more letter, and then me in person - I arrive two days before you do, I've given up the idea of a day in London as I can't get a sleeper so will come up on 14th and then have to tear madly round getting my presents, book tokens will be the order of the day I think. Till then all*

*my love - keep out of the san if you can and don't break anything on the Rugger field!*  
*Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Monday 30th November 1959 Cherideo T.E.

*My dear Alan,*

*My last letter, by the time it arrives I shall be almost on my way. As usual I've frozen into the state of not being able to do anything except worry that I should be doing something. Actually there is very little to do, simply have to slip into my Terylene skirt and leave. Poor Daddy finds himself saddled with all the arrangements for the spree as Cappie still isn't back, so he will be so busy he will hardly notice I've gone which is a good thing really. Everything is a ghastly muddle as far as the spree is concerned, but I daresay it'll be all right in the end.*

*The decorations have ended up by being bowls of tired ferns and clumps of bamboos, not very original but who cares, these sprees are outdated anyway as nobody can afford them and everyone ends up with fallen arches and sick headaches. Which reminds me, Daddy has a painful foot that Tom Poole says is a fallen arch, personally I don't think it is but Daddy amuses himself picking up pencils between his toes in the evenings to exercise his feet and is rather proud of it. He manages to skip around tennis courts and golf courses pretty nimbly too.*

*We had the Merediths over for the day yesterday, Daddy and John played golf in the morning and Daphne and I spent the day sitting on the verandah drinking cups of coffee and keeping the dogs apart. Actually Fi fi was quite good and spent most of the time on Daphne's knee. I rather foolishly let the cook make a steak and kidney pudding for lunch, he swore he knew how but the bearer eventually staggered in with an enormous cracked bowl at the bottom of which was crouching a tiny grey object which tasted as much like old glue as it looked. Daphne has a wonderful cook and is fearfully fussy about her food so I broke into a cold sweat, however she nobly chewed her way through some of it and the pudding was quite nice, sponge cake soaked in sherry and filled with fruit salad. I had had a sleepless night the night before and had run out of pills so was pretty exhausted by the time they finally left at 8 p.m. Poor Daphne, she and Babs are going to spend Christmas in a seedy hotel in Bournemouth with Daphne's mother who is extremely difficult and crochety, it sounds too dreary for words. There isn't even a Telly apparently and the bath water is always cold, I feel very lucky to have a home to come back to, just couldn't bear to live in hotels. Daphne is travelling first class, so it wouldn't have been much point us going home together anyway.*

*On Saturday we went into tennis with the Lumley Ellises, they were going camping that evening so we all had to pick up and leave as soon as it got dark, I'm not sure where they were going to camp but not very far up the river I shouldn't think as they were taking the usual staff of liveried servants along. Our young bearer, Kellile, is now working for them, he told me his father was ill and he was needed at home. Anyway I hope they enjoy having him lurking behind doors listening to their conversations and smoking all their cigarettes.*

*On the last day he was here Daddy counted the cigarettes in his tin just for fun, and every time he went to them there was one less than there should have been, so Kellile must have been taking five or six every day the so and so. The Corps set off on their Manas trip to-day and its beginning to cloud over here, but I daresay it'll be all right there. I hope they catch something after all we've said about it.*

*On Friday I went to have my hair cut and Bette insisted that I spent the day. As you can imagine we spent a lot of it staring at her cauliflowers, it was very embarrassing as Sherry (the poodle) welcomed me hysterically and refused to leave my side all day, and when it was time to leave she got into the back of the car and had to be dragged out forcibly, I feel I*

*shan't be asked to keep her again. I feel so sorry for her as she never gets taken out for walks and the other dog gets all the love and attention, would love to have her if it wasn't for the other three.*

*Nita wrote to me yesterday to say she had another dog, a labrador puppy, which brings her up to five now as she's keeping the Brown's poodle. She and Kathleen Poole and I have enough between us to start a kennel, I wish I had enough money really to start one and rescue all the miserable specimens one sees around. We're going for our last river picnic next Sunday with the Pooles, having rather lost hope of catching any fish in the Dikko but it doesn't matter.*

*A mad search is in progress for my keys, so I must go and join in before Daddy tears the place apart, they are either in Miranda's run or under the French beans I fancy. Can't tell you how excited I am at the thought of seeing you in under three weeks, look after yourself especially on the Rugger field, are you permanently in the 2nd XV, well actually you won't have time to answer questions come to think of it.*

*I couldn't send this as I hadn't an envelope & got your letter about the Scholarship interview – wonderful effort. Even if you don't get any further it will still have been an achievement, we'll be keeping our fingers crossed for you on Thursday. Thank you for getting the £22 which will be a great help to us all. I haven't forgotten I owe you 5 of it!*

*See you very soon – Much love till then, Mummy*

*Iris to Donald, 12th December 1959, Oberoi Grand Hotel, Calcutta*

*My darling,*

*Well here I am, no forced landing at Patna, the old Grand Hotel band grinding away (but not too loud as I have an A.C. room, hope the company won't mind, but it's only for 1 night I didn't see why they should!) and my thoughts with you having dinner with Kathleen - and not drinking too many gins and getting in a mood for Nazira graveyard I hope! The flight was very good, we arrived just as it was getting dark. I got the bus (various other horrid looking planters got into large cars and never offered me a lift) and enjoyed the drive as I sat behind 2 wonderful babus who had one of those half-English half-Bengali conversations that would have reduced you to hysterics. Unfortunately the bus only took me to the air terminal and there I had to stand on the pavement for a full ten minutes surrounded by whining rickshaw drivers, was just about to take one when a taxi arrived. When I got here there was a note from Kilburns saying "herewith car to take you to the Grand" some mix-up somewhere! Glad I didn't know they were sending a car, or I'd have waited about and missed the bus. I was so tired I stopped there, but of course couldn't sleep for ages, a riotous party was shouting and breaking glasses somewhere quite close, and I was awake again at 5 this morning so the company paid all that for nothing! I did my shopping after I had signed in and walked the 5½ miles of marble passages to my room and back, as usual this place is full of ageing Yanks escorting very young Indian girls, sad. I got Rs40 for my coin in the shop here, and found all my "little" presents mounting up as usual, also had to buy myself a ht bottle! I have Rs25 in hand and am sending 10 for the cook herewith and will keep the rest in case of emergencies. I went down to the New Market and bought a pineapple among other things, it weighs a ton, my case weighed exactly 40lbs by the way. As usual I got sore toes and a splitting headache down there, but it was rather gay, piles of wonderful fruit, nuts, balloons, silver balls etc. Although I spent Rs45 I cant think what on - a few cards, 5 egg cups, a couple of scarves, 4 lucky beans, and a little bamboo basket! Anyway I shall have everything by the time I arrive which will be a relief. I leave at 11 for Bombay and am not dreading the Viscount as much as the other things, a jet airliner landed at Dum Dum while I was there, dropped down like a*



*feather and drew up in about ten yards, I think it was probably a Viscount as it was too small for a comet.*

*I'm thinking of you this morning, and am hoping you won't have too gruelling a day darling, anyway you won't have a moment to worry about me. I'm missing you horribly already, I keep thinking "I must tell Mac about that" - and then remember I shan't be able to. Still it's worse for you, being left with all those ghastly Tom Darbys. Don't let them get you down and don't let the Other Thing worry you too much, we shall struggle through, we always have. One of the couples on the plane were coming to meet their son and brought (for 3 days) 5 huge pigskin cases, he pulled wads of notes out of a real crocodile wallet to pay their excess, and bounced backwards and forwards on shoes with 4 inch crepe soles smoking cigarettes out of a solid gold holder. They were both ugly and middle aged and bored with each other though, could they have been planters? I didn't catch their name.*

*Well darling, I'll end this for now. I must ring up Kilburns and find if they're sending a car for me this morning, unfortunately Indian Airlines bus doesn't call here, but it's quite close.*

*I'm thinking of you all the time darling, and I know the time will pass very quickly. Don't get depressed, I will live as cheaply as I possibly can and curb Mummy's wild schemes. My love to the loggies and puddys, and all I have to you my darling - take care of yourself - Always - Totty*

On the back, in my father's hand, is a list - presumably of what to write back about

*Letter, Spree, Vege, Dogs & deer, Thing, LE.*

On Monday 14th December 1959 Iris arrived home in England

# 1960



Last group photograph of Assam Company personnel taken January 1960<sup>213</sup>

[Extracts concerning Assam in letters from Iris to my father; the bulk of the letters are about life in the Lake District and are in *Lakeland Life*]

Iris to Donald, 1st Jan, 1960 Field Head

*My darling,*

*So glad to get your letter and hear all is well - except with Tessa. Poor Sweet, please give her the liver injections, and if that fails a shot of Babesan. I didn't think she'd pine that much and I feel it must be something else. All is well here, except a shock from the bank this morning, saying I'm £67 overdrawn and I must send some more quickly! I can't understand this as I thought you had sent £110 early in the month and another £30 later. I've issued cheques of £84-16-0 (including £40 to Mummy) so even with the previous overdraft I should have been covered. Could you please cable some money quickly darling and I'll try and pacify them for another week or so. Terribly sorry about this but I'm trying to be economical but Christmas has been the blot, and Alan's suit and F's party dress. I've been feeling quite ill all day worrying about this as I was quite sure I was within my limits. I'll ask the Bank to let me know when you send money in future, once this ruddy party is over I hope not to have to spend anything more, but there'll be 2 months' rent, oh dear, I do hope Someone is going to talk to Remnant! ....Darling this isn't a proper letter, just an S.O.S. so will write again soon, do hope the flap over Remnant<sup>214</sup> isn't too exhausting and that Tessa is better. Love you lots. Totty*

Iris to Donald, 5th January, 1960 Field Head

*My darling,*

*.....I shall be thinking of you and your party, do hope somebody has talked to Remnant about our financial plight. All the tea firms (Brooke Bond etc) are booming, it seems a bit hard that we should get poorer and poorer. Will write sensibly on Thursday darling.*

*Love you lots and lots. Totty.*

Iris to Donald, Saturday 9th Jan, 1960 Field Head

*Darling heart,*

*A letter at last, I was getting worried as I hadn't heard for nearly 2 weeks. I'm sorry you're so depressed darling, try to hang on, it's only 8 weeks now and it'll go very quickly....About the money darling, I think the muddle started because nobody told me £50 had been transferred to Martins. I understood I was allowed to cash up to £50 on my Grindlays Account, and haven't touched that 50 yet. I couldn't understand how, when I'd only cashed £84 I should be £67 overdrawn, which meant you'd only sent 40 odd pounds last month. Anyway I'll now be able to pay the 2 months rent I owe and other oddments and then will juggle my bills. I really am going to try and get a job, and if you get the sack there are lots of jobs in the Westmorland Gazette and I heard the driver of the Hawkshead bus saying how short they were! But hang on if you can till you come on leave, you can judge better what if anything the company is going to do about us.... So glad Tessa is better, I've been worrying about her. My regards to the Hon. Peter -*

*Take care of yourself sweet and write often. I love you lots, Totty*

Iris to Donald, 16th Jan, 1960 Field Head

*My darling - You would love to be in my position - sitting by the fire with the England-Wales Rugger starting on the Telly. I wish you were here, it seems so unfair that we should have all this lovely sport and you nothing..... I tracked down that £50 to Martins, nobody had told me about it! It will go in paying rent etc. and I'll manage with the £70 will pay the girls bills out of it. I do hope somebody spoke to Remnant about our finances, everybody here is rolling in money, everybody. Actually I find England smug and grasping, makes me a bit sick thinking about all those poor wretches without jobs in Assam, here it's quite repulsive to see greasy little couples on the "Telly" going off with enormous cars and washing machines for answering questions a child of ten would know. Money and teenagers seem to be all that count here, and there's plenty of both about, perhaps it's because I'm poor and middle-aged that I find it a bit depressing - but I don't think so!*

*I'm sorry Charles couldn't take Dinah, I hope she'll be all right with Steve. I shall never forget the awful condition Mopsy was in when she came to us - but Kathleen will keep an eye on her too I expect. Glad the veg are doing well - what about the sweet peas? I wonder what the cook turned out for Remnants visit?! Really the L.E's are incredible. I wonder what they'd say if everyone wrote back and said no, sorry, they couldn't. The facts I want about tea bushes are: how much a bush yields a year, how many lbs made from it, average life of a bush, average price of a lb of tea, how much a bush earns in its lifetime?!*

*Darling I feel ill every morning too, so lonely at the thought of another day without you, but it will pass and then we'll be together always. So try not to get too gloomy and worried please - I feel the bad period is coming to an end. I love you lots - write to the girls soon. Always, Totty*

Iris to Donald, Sunday 24th Jan 1960 Field Head

*Please write to the girls*

*My darling,*

*Thank you for a letter of a few days ago in which you were just off to the Moran spree - I hope you got the polo sorted out and T. Darby, out particularly. I suppose he's been dogging Remnants every step - along with Moll! I find it hard to think any of them exist actually. I hope you've had some rain, the compound must be terribly brown and horrid...Darling I will come to London to meet you if you really want, but it seems rather an expense, and all of them will be home by then. M & D leave on March 21st so I shall have time to clean up a bit and fill all available dustbins before you arrive. It doesn't look much as if I shall get a job, the only things I see are at Kendal. Anyway I'm trying to spend as little as I possibly can, the £70 hasn't arrived yet but I expect it will soon. Shall have to ask if I can pay Alan's bill in installments. I still owe M. about £12. We'll muddle through as long as Lahoty<sup>215</sup> is prepared to hang on - but it is irritating that everyone else (including tea firms) should be prospering while we slowly sink. Anyway darling I love you and I know we shall get through this bad patch very soon I'm sure. Such a lovely morning, wish I could take a sketching block out on to the hills but ! Longing to see your picture please bring it home. All love my sweet, Always - Totty*

Iris to Donald, Monday 1st Feb 1960 Field Head

*My Darling - The £70 has arrived, thank you darling. I'll pay one of the girls bills and other odd bills like coal and groceries and finish paying off Mummy....Come home early in April won't you, don't get mixed up with Easter which is about 10th I think. Is your passage fixed yet? Was there anything about intermediary passages in the new terms? Don't forget Peter's address darling - I hope you're not too involved in this Polo business, glad you ousted Tom and hope your team justifies itself. How are the new ponies shaping? Will write again in a couple of days love to loggies and lots and lots to you, my darling always Totty*

Iris to Donald, 3rd Feb 1960 Field Head

*My Sweet,...I got a letter from the bank saying £70 had arrived. Can't quite make it out as came on Jan 30th but you've already sent your quote for Jan. Anyway they're sending me a statement sometime I suppose. Do hope you're feeling less depressed now darling, I get terrible fits of it too, specially in the evenings when I'm tired and cold ...But it really isn't long now, and then we shall have 6 months of freedom from T.R.D's and L-E's and the rest. Anyway we needn't worry about getting the sack if that's what they do for you. I suggest you sell the factory in tidy lots and when L-E tumbles to it that it isn't there we can be sacked and get a nice pension and no worries. I suppose dear Houldey wangled it. Let me know what day you are arriving, Fiona says you won't look at me when you see her in her straight skirt probably true but I hope not as I need lots of love and encouragement, middle aged and oniony as I am. All my love and long kisses - Totty.*

Iris to Donald, Wednesday 10th Feb 1960 Field Head

*My own darling,*

*Letters pouring in for us all - thank you darling. So sorry to hear about your cold. I can imagine what the dust must be like, do hope you get some rain soon. Thank you also for the*

*£100 I had 2 letters from the bank, one on 13th and one on 30th saying they had received £70 but I knew there must be a mistake, I will spend this £100 on paying half Alan's bill and 1 of the girls, and if you can get another £100 home early next month I'll pay the rest off. I have £30 left of the £70 but bills of £26 still to be paid. My head is in a whirl of trying to make ends meet, it just isn't possible and even the thought of your leave is being spoilt by worries as we shall have to find another £200 as soon as you arrive for next term! I didn't realise you were coming as late as April 10th darling, the children break up on March 29th. Fiona had a lift down to London on 1st and was planning to stay a few days with friends and then meet you, still I suppose it's too late to alter things now. I'll fix the hotel, and do your driving license when I get it. You might tell Houldey that I couldn't afford the fare down to meet you - not that he cares! I knew Peter Remnant would come and go without anything happening - oh dear this is a miserable letter. Yes, book both girls back by boat with me, I shall definitely bring Anne not sure about Fiona but anyway we can cancel it later. Don't take any notice of my moans, we'll struggle through, we can always get the sack (you might tell Houldey that too - that our best bet is to get the sack for bad management as per Cappie!)... Tell me more about the compound darling, which flowers are nice? How are the cats? do keep an eye open for a pony for Annie when we go back (if we do?!). Hope this moan doesn't depress you, don't let it. I just get gloomy, hopeless spells but they don't last. It'll be better when we're together, and that isn't very long now, we've got more than half way. Take care of your sniffles and keep loving me as I do you - always. Will write to-morrow. Totty*

Iris to Donald, 25th Feb 1960 Field Head

*My own darling husband - for 19 years to-day (I hope). This is to say how much I love you and hope to spend at least another 50 years with you - promise? I shall drink a tiny little toast to you in cooking sherry but we'll save the real celebration till you come back. Please don't have morbid thoughts about not giving me anything, you have given me all the important things darling and I now have everything any woman would want. I promise you that's true, and you mustn't listen to my moans about money (I wasn't going to mention that word, bother!) I think we're coming to the end of our difficult period anyway, and we shall soon look back on it and wonder what the fuss was about. As long as we have our love nothing else matters, not even this house, or the job - nothing. And I think we'll have that for always don't you? I feel pretty smug about it! I hadn't heard from you for two weeks (till yesterday) and Fiona kept teasing me that you'd run off with another woman, but I was much more worried that you were ill or depressed or in prison - anyway I got 2 letters and feel on top of the world. I'll send off the form when I get your license. I think you said you'd sent it with the bills but they haven't arrived yet. It would be a good idea to drive straight up from the Air Terminal, or even the Airport? I could send the money there, if you tell me your flight number. That would save you going into London at all. I shouldn't come up the M.1 but don't go by too many back roads. I want you as soon as possible!....I'll write again to-morrow darling about finance, but don't worry, I'm not flapping any more. I'll just tell you exactly how things are. The bank hasn't sent me a statement this month. Not long now before we can fight it over together - oh how I long for that shoulder of yours - I'm not the sort of woman who can manage alone - but soon you'll be here and I'll cast myself and my troubles into your arms. All my love, Totty*

Iris to Donald, 9th Mar, 1960 Field Head

*My darling - No letter since my anniversary one 10 days ago - but I expect it's been held up....Could you book us back on a B.I. boat, taking us to India Holiday diary? Would save a*

*lot of trouble. The bank say they haven't got the £30 you were sending last month, or anything this month. If you didn't send the £30 off, could you please send the full £150 this month darling? I got my book with a bill for £14 for typing - I nearly swooned. I promise that's my last effort! Anyway I'm £30 in the red, with 1 and a half school bills still to pay (and my local bills) so you see it's a bit tricky. As I say, I shan't move out of the house or bath or have any lunch this month but will need something for rent after they go, or a birthday present for Fiona (her birthday on April 1st don't forget!). It seems no time at all till I shall be getting ready for you, lovely thought, apparently I can get a provisional driving licence for a week or so if yours doesn't arrive, but it should. Love you so much my love - Totty*

Iris to Donald, 17th Mar, 1960 Field Head

*My darling one,*

*Time is really passing now, and it'll be no time at all before you're on your way. I shall definitely come to meet you. I'm coming by night bus and taking Lucy (Robert and Angela's baby) as they're driving down in their rickety car, and aren't happy about her. I'll meet you at the Terminal. If your driving license hasn't arrived we shall have to collect a provisional one - come to think of it we can't on a Sunday. So send me your A.A. membership card and I'll get one here if I can. Thank you for the money darling. We'll manage, the next lot of school bills can wait a bit, the last for the girls. Fiona seems quite happy at the thought of coming back with us but Anne says it's quite spoilt the thought for her - they loath each other! ... Well darling, keep going for another couple of weeks, what you suggest is plenty for the animals. Couldn't the cook do pani-wallah for the Corps or Chowkidar work? I'll write to Lavender. All my love till I see you and give it to you. Totty*

Iris to Donald, Sunday 27th Mar 1960 Field Head

*My darling,*

*Just to put your mind at rest about your license which arrived yesterday and I bunged it straight off to Kendal so it should be all right. Which is one worry off our minds. Now most of the worries are with you, getting everything settled, especially the animals. Do hope there won't be any hitches darling. I hate this time just before you leave in case anything goes wrong, but try and get on that plane darling, even if it means selling the factory. Once you're here nothing will matter any more, you and I can live on bread and cheese quite happily can't we, I have been for the past couple of weeks and feel better for it. ...Will write again in a couple of days, soon it'll be my last letter - very soon darling - and then!! All my love till then. Totty.*

Iris to Donald, Monday 28th March, 1960 Field Head

*Darling - My one but last letter, I really can't believe it can you. Life has been going along so slowly and dully and now suddenly everything is going to happen at once. I do hope you will have a good trip, don't bring us any presents please, we would much rather choose something here. Thank you very much for the £15 darling, it made all the difference. the bank is allowing me an overdraft this month and we'll just have to catch up slowly.... Never mind darling, battered and half-asleep if I am, I shall be there to meet you, at the Air Terminal and don't intend to let you out of my sight for more than the time it takes to go and fill the coal skuttle again! In case this is my last letter - see you in London, with all my misses till then - Totty*



Iris to Donald, 30th Mar 1960 Field Head

*My darling - So sorry to get your worried letter yesterday about the encroachment trouble. Why do you always get yourself arrested just before you leave darling? Seriously though I'm terribly sorry you've had all this worry on top of everything else, and then L-E being tiresome too, you are quite right to stand up to him, its what he needs and the Board but nobody else will. I suppose it's just penetrated their thick heads that they're going to lose all the money they've invested in Africa, or rather I suppose its us who will lose indirectly. Anyway, a bit of news that I hope will cheer you up - Alan has got a place at Worcester College. I'm delighted and I know you will be....I want to get this off with Anne, so no more for now, see you on Sunday darling (I hope) and try not to get yourself in a state about it all, though I know it's difficult. So glad the Rosses have got a flat. All my love and mind you get on that plane. Always, Totty*

On 10th April 1960 my father arrived home in England and stayed until 5th October. He was able to drive me down to Haileybury where my uncle Richard was a master, and I made my way from there to Oxford.

My mother and sisters left England for Assam. They went by P.& O. "Chusan", leaving London 1st October 1960, bound for Bombay.

Iris to Alan, Gibraltar, October 1960, Chusan [tourist class]

*My dear Alan,*

*We're just stopping here, very impressive but cloudy & not warm as I'd thought. Everything has gone well so far. Fiona was a little green one day but it hasn't really been rough. Our fellow passengers are mostly Indians we're sitting at a table with 6 gents – quite amusing & an absolute gift for Peter Sellers! We had a Gala night last night & I have never seen anything as funny as the Sikhs with paper hats on top of their turbans, all very frivolous & doing rope tricks with their table napkins! Fiona is the only girl on the tourist side so has collared the only 2 males – a couple of merchant seamen, both very nice luckily & she has stopped saying "Steve" in a lugubrious voice every five minutes! The Highams & Darbys are on the 1st class, & we're going ashore with the latter & hoping to avoid the former!*

*Our cabins are very nice, I'm sharing with a nice missionary going to Sarawak<sup>216</sup>. I've told her about Geoffrey<sup>217</sup> but I don't suppose they'll meet as she's going into the depths of the jungle. There are masses of missionaries aboard, & 1 Buddhist monk who looked very seasick so obviously hasn't got full control of his senses! It's going to be very difficult to get any deck space when it gets warm, but I may slink up to the first class.*

*I'm trying to give Anne a little instruction but it's not easy with so many distractions, have met a Frenchman who is helping, much to Anne's horror!*

*I do wonder how you are settling. Have cosy visions of you & the Provost dressed in Terylene trousers sharing tea from the black tea-pot but don't fancy it will turn out quite like that. I'm longing to hear anyway, don't work too hard and write soon – at Bombay I hope ...*

*Must go ashore as we have stopped.*

*All our love & thoughts, Mummy*

Back in Assam, my mother wrote describing the rest of the journey and the current pattern of their life back at Cherideo.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Oct 1960

*My dear Alan,*

*A week since we arrived here, and it seems a month, can't believe that this time last Friday we were bumping our way up the Assam valley in a rather rickety Dakota. We left Dum Dum at 3.30 a.m. and all went well until we were with an hour or so of the destination, and then there was thick mist and low cloud, and the pilot got lost – we kept swooping down to tree top level and hurtling over roof tops and rice fields in the hopes of finding Mackeypore, Fiona was up with the pilot in front and found it amusing, but I didn't! He also took us about ten feet above the rhinos at Kaziranga, I had such a mist of tears in front of my eyes that I couldn't even see them. Finally we landed an hour late, and it was wonderful to get back to a cool bungalow and unpack our creased and grubby belongings for the last time. The dogs and cats and Miranda are all well, but the garden has almost disappeared under weeds due to the company's economy campaign which means cutting down to two malis, however Anne and I plan to re-claim it. My sunken garden is almost impossible to locate, but the one thing about Assam is the way things recover as quickly as they deteriorate.*

*Calcutta wasn't very exciting, we went to the New Market and did a little shopping and saw a terrifying film called "Vertigo", all about men clinging to drains with their finger-nails six stories up, I could watch very little of it. It was Dewali, the festival of lights, while we were there but we were disappointed in the decorations, and kept awake half the night by enormous explosions under our windows, local fireworks I suppose. Since we've been here we've lived a quiet life, Fiona has never had so many early nights in succession since she left school and will soon begin to chafe I feel, but the social life should improve next month and once we can get her launched we can sit back and suck oranges in peace.*

*It is still warm in the day but not unbearable, and we're sleeping under a blanket, this morning there is a solid blanket of mist which is a sign of the real cold weather, what we really need is rain. there hasn't been any for five weeks and the roads are suffocatingly dusty.*

*We've established a routine, Anne and I work from 9.30 to 12.30 in the mornings, and 2.30 to 4 in the afternoon, and then we play a bit of tennis or take the dogs out. It gets dark at six so we fill the Telly gap by teaching them Bridge, Annie is going to be good but Fiona is far too impatient and can't stop drivelling long enough to concentrate. Dinner is at eight and then bed, not very exciting but pleasantly restful.*

*We're looking for a pony for Anne and F. has taken to the tennis courts in a big way when she has learnt to serve. We have the court in action and are about to erect a badminton net. We are going up the river on Sunday, just a short way as it'll still be wet but there are fish about we hear.*

*The most important aspect of our life, Anne's work, I just don't know about, she knows so much more than I do at the moment that I find it hard to keep up with her, but she's very keen and bright and I don't see why we should not struggle as far as "10" level. Fiona is doing her shorthand and typing erratically, and pages and page of paper are covered with ryth bon ffirt yrub which she says is progress!*

*We were delighted to get your letter a few days ago, your life sounds incredibly gay and I can understand your difficulty in fitting in any work, particularly as its all left to you. When do these beastly Prelims come off? How is the grant working out? Have you met any old Dragon friends, or been to the school? A barrage of questions and I don't really expect too many letters as time must be a problem but we're all panting for information – Fiona filled with jealousy too at the thought of the dives and the dozens of extra CHAPS.*

*Breakfast time and then a mad rush round the cookhouse before school, the cook is just the same and we're all doubled up with indigestion. We have breakfast on the verandah, fresh pineapple and oranges and bananas and papaya which we eat while we watch the egrets*

*stalking the lawn, the nicest time of day. Yesterday morning Daddy shot his first moorghi and Anne – she and I were wandering behind, and though he aimed miles wide of us one of the pellets must have ricochet off a tree and snicked her arm and leg – she let out a yell and doubled up and you can imagine how I felt. Daddy was most concerned with finding the moorghi, but Dinah rose to the occasion, a lovely cockerel, and the story of Anne's shooting is now ready to be embroidered and brought out on all possible occasions.*

*[The letter is incomplete, a page or two missing]*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, November 13th 1960

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is a couple of days late as Fiona used the last Airgraph, I don't suppose in your crowded life you will notice. We got a very nice letter yesterday which cheered us up no end, I was afraid my last one might have depressed you. We were most amused to read about the Queen's visit, specially as we'd read the sequel about the foundation stone having been stolen, any of your pals?*

*It's hard to think about floods when we're having such perfect weather here, day after golden days (now I come to open my bleary eyes a bit I see that there are CLOUDS this morning, but they won't last). Life continues to be peaceful which suits three of us, Fiona is bearing up as best she can with the week-ends as bright prospects to cheer her through from Tuesday to Friday. Our new assistant has arrived, Terry Luscombe,<sup>218</sup> just 20, fourteen and a half stone and quite presentable, but hasn't got what it takes apparently – or perhaps it's just that he's already engaged! He stayed here for a couple of days while the chaos of the Raj's was cleared away from his bungalow, and I felt sorry for him going off to live by himself not knowing a single word of the language, however he seems to be managing and has stuck pictures of Rugger matches all over his walls to cheer himself up – Rugger is his passion and by his build I should think he's very good. His chief attraction for us is his Transistor gramophone and pile of records, we wore out half his torch batteries while he was with us. They're wonderful things, he bought it in Aden for less than we paid for ours and of course there's no plugging in, we might be able to afford one on the way home. He's also a beginner at tennis and comes up of an evening to practise with Fiona, she made her first appearance at the club yesterday, perfect panic and much pacing of the verandah first, but she eventually enjoyed herself.*

*We stayed on to see the film "The Wind Cannot Read" which actually ran from start to finish and was a beautiful coloured tour of India apart from Dirk Bogarde and a ravishing Japanese girl. On Saturday I took the girls up to Sonari to see the film and what the prospects were generally, the club only has twenty members now, but is homely and riotously gay compared to Nazira and Fiona enjoyed herself jiving to ancient records. The film was "The Mountain" which I couldn't possibly describe as I had my head in my hands most of the time, everytime I peered through my fingers another crevasse was opening up under somebody, it was horrible.*

*That is the extent of our gaiety, the other big thrill is the arrival of Anne's pony, a nice little chestnut with four legs and a head and tail. She spends every spare moment mucking out and seems to enjoy it, she rides in the early mornings and I must say its heavenly with the rice fields glistening in the morning mist and everything golden and smoky.*

*Do you have time to do any private reading for pleasure? I'm simply loving "Cider with Rosie" by Laurie Lee, you should try and read it, a model of lovely evocative writings. Lessons go on – I get very depressed at times wondering if we are making any headway, but Anne is learning short hand if nothing else. I'm thoroughly enjoying the Pelican Histories*

*and have never been so well informed, but Anne finds them just beyond her and a glazed look comes into her eyes every time I open one!*

*What else is there? The tomatoes are growing and we're eating the first beans, the animals are well – how different our lives are at the moment. Daddy says he really wants to add a bit to this so I'll leave him some room, do you hear from Martin or anyone, I wonder if he got his job?*

*[from my father] At long last I have managed to get a little space to write a word. Very pleased indeed with your letter and hearing about your goings-on. I would love to be there and wish I had worked a bit harder when I was younger! Mummy has told you most of the news, very monotonous really, but chugging slowly along. I think the girls are enjoying it, Fiona is on to some Scots lad "Verra Scots" in fact. Haven't done any serious fishing yet but hope to go up this week end, from all accounts there are plenty of fish. Tried to get to the river from this side but we were stopped by the Military post. Awful nuisance having to go all the way round. No more room, all the best in your exams,*

*Lots of love, Daddy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo November 19th 1960

*My dear Alan,*

*A nice letter to thank you for, though I'm sorry mine depressed you. Don't worry about the finances, we shall manage somehow and it will get easier when we've paid off the girls' passages. We can get the Battels home before mid-Jan. I don't doubt, and will then repay what you have had to fork out of your grant, let us know how this is going through. Your main worry at the moment will be Prelims, what a bore and so much a matter of luck in things like Latin Unseens. I hope you'll continue to hold out against the militant (and un-Christian!) Christians. You seem to have reached a stage beyond them, that hammering of one's ideas into other people is usually replaced by a mature, more tolerant un-anxious certainty that God can be all things to all people, and how they worship him is their own affair. Horrible grammar but you know what I mean. That devastating narrowness is surely a contradiction of every Christian precept!*

*To more mundane topics, our daily round continues, much the same except that Tessa has been very ill since Saturday, and is still groggy though I think over the worst. As usual, with no vet to consult, it's a hit and miss business trying to cure her, I think it is pneumonia but we gave her a Tick Fever injection on Sunday just to be sure. We had planned our first proper river expedition with boat, but had to put it off as we didn't like to leave her, just as well as she had a very bad day and we had to give her a heart stimulant at one stage. She's now wrapped in an old sweater of Daddy's, staggering weakly and looking incredibly silly and pathetic but I hope is going to recover. She's skin and bone at the best of times.*

*We gave our first tennis party on Thursday and apart from the old bounceless balls, the spongy pitted court and the worms the cook put all over the cake, it went off well. We only had close friends, the Leethams who are on the garden, and the Highams and Terry (new assistant) – oh I forgot and the cat clawing at people's legs as they drank their tea. We rounded off the afternoon by giving them a glass of Rum Cup I'd brewed up the evening before, it was supposed to be like the cup we made for the party but wasn't, and as I'd boiled most of it away we had to fill it with lumps of ice to make it go round which effectively removed the last trace of taste.*

*When the Highams had left we played bridge with the Leethams, Daddy and I holding such wonderful cards that we couldn't fail to beat them though they are rather good. The girls are getting the hang of the game and our family sessions are more soothing now and less inclined to end in blows or tears.*

*On Saturday we went up to Sonari again, persuaded Daddy to come too and we saw "The 39 Steps" which we thoroughly enjoyed, lovely scenes of Scotland and all jolly schoolboyish adventure. "The 7<sup>th</sup> Seal" sounds a wonderful film, I'll see if I can't get them to get it here though perhaps it's a bit beyond Nazira P.O.*

*Fiona looks very thoughtful and wistful when she reads your letters, life is far too quiet for her here at the moment and the only young man who interests her hasn't got a car. Terry's father is one of the directors of Hutchinson's (publisher) which might be a useful contact if you thought of that line of business (he is not the young man, it is a very young Aberdonian at Sonari but don't say I said so!). Next week-end she and I are going to Selang to stay with the Edyes for their Spree, deadly as far as I'm concerned, but there are one or two likely Prospects there for F. I think she misses other girls most, Anne has her horse to keep her occupied and lessons fill a lot of the day.*

*I still find History the most difficult, how does one teach it, I just read her bits and then she tries to make notes which she loathes. I never seem to have time to prepare it properly and the effect is disjointed and jumbled. I'm sure that book you mentioned (Green) would be useful, we're doing the 1485-1615 period, the Tudors. We're just through the Anglo Saxons and I thought of you when we dismissed the Ven. Bede in one sentence! Shorthand is still a source of much moaning from Fiona, but also mild hysteria at the sentences we have to write i.e. "Dame Bates showed the pale hero the way to weed" or "The chatty Yankee and the rude rogue made many a cup of cocoa" – delightfully incongruous pictures they summon up and a cinch for a Telly play.*

*I hear from Granny that Martin has been finally thrown out, I wonder how long it will last, the gang will be dispersed without his room to gather in but perhaps after Oxford you will find them puerile anyway. Have you met anyone you like particularly? Have you heard from Ian or Geoffrey? Tell the latter to send any stamps he has, for Anne!*

*Time to start our afternoon session with the pale hero, so no more. Every one sends their love, (or is it his love and her love, my grammar revision with Anne is making it almost impossible to write or speak without wondering if I'm breaking a rule).*

*Much love,  
Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, December 6th 1960*

*My dear Alan,*

*You will be home and dry by now – or maybe not so dry judging by the stories we hear of the weather. I do hope the exams weren't too bad and you're now enjoying the aftermath of released tension. It won't be a wildly exciting holiday probably, what with one thing and another (both the same thing in fact!) but I know it will cheer Granny and Granpa up having you and perhaps Richard will be there too for a bit. I just can't get any Christmas spirit together here, none of us can, we keep saying every morning that we really must make some cards and that's as far as it's got.*

*Fiona is off to stay with a friend to-morrow for a few days, she doesn't now want to go and leave her boy friends here who she has got delicately balanced round her in in a delicious state of indecision, as there are no other girls for fifty miles I don't think she need worry! Actually she has one of the only girls coming to spend the day to-day, she comes from Moran district and is staying locally for a few days, we met another from Jorhat on Sunday, a certain Miss Mould whose name couldn't have suited her better!*

*It was the Jorhat-Assam Company cricket match, an all-day affair of which I managed to watch the last ball. Lunch was laid on at the club as usually happens all the Jorhat C. people collected in little huddles and we did ditto and it was hardly the jolly get together that was*

*intended. Fiona enjoyed it though, and I spent a sleepless night waiting for her to come back, not that there's so much cause for worry here and I'm most thankful she isn't going to be at home for the winter's revelry.*

*Anne Johnson wrote yesterday with news of what she hoped was in store, I hope you'll find someone to partner at dances, judging by Anne's letter the selection doesn't seem to have widened much. Sad about Anne Hogg's father, so many people seem to be sickening suddenly.*

*Nothing startling to report otherwise, beans, horses, cooks etc. continue to thrive, the cook's wife produced another daughter this week, that makes two of each and I can't think how they intend to feed them all. He now goes about with a knitted cap over one eye which completes the air of dottiness clinging to him, oh dear that's mixed metaphor, this teaching business makes me so self-conscious I can hardly speak or write.*

*We don't seem to make much headway, Monday to Friday passes in a flash and we still haven't finished Edward 1, the trouble with history is that I have five different books all of which tell me slightly different things so I dither between them. However I refuse to worry. One of my chief difficulties is getting into the schoolroom by nine thirty each morning, what with the vast problems of organising my dopey servants and my dopey daughter.*

*We have two accountants coming to stay on Friday for about five days, one is a strict vegetarian and will be strictly starved as far as I can see. We desperately need rain (can you believe it?) and if we have another drought like last year all the tea will die so they say, can't say I'm worried about the tea but I am about the garden. The rice cutting is in progress at the moment and Fiona has done some very good sketches and an oil painting, we dropped her the other evening in the middle of a field and when we had picked her up and got her home she found she was missing all her brushes, you can imagine how pleased Daddy was at having to go back and peer at blades of rice over ten acres in the pitch dark, by some miracle we found the brushes though, as it would have been the end of ART otherwise, they are a fearful price out here.*

*We have been out several evenings to try and see a leopard that is around, the Leethams nearly ran it over the other night. They (L's) had a litter of leopards brought into them in the rains, two of which were black, terribly rare and they managed to rear them and send them to the zoo in London. The only thing we see is Miranda's boyfriend who is getting quite tame and comes out in the day time, we often contemplate letting her out to join him but I'm not sure that she would be able to look after herself. Daddy is going to write a line.*

*[from my father] I join Mummy in hoping that the exams went well and that you didn't "fash" yourself over much. Life churns on out here and it is hard to imagine that I have been out just over two months, soon be thinking of leave again! No fishing yet I am afraid, one thing and another seems to crop up and we don't get the chance, will make a more determined effort after Xmas. We'll have a good time and my love to all, keep writing. We love getting your letters. Lots of love, Daddy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo December 13th 1960*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm hoping this will arrive in time to wish you lots of Christmas cheer, but if you've already had it, I hope it's not sitting too heavily on your solar plexus! We haven't heard from you since the Exam so I don't know whether to mention it or not, or when you're likely to be having results. I expect you've put the whole thing out of your mind for a week or two, and I hope you're getting some hops and the weather is cheering up. Strange to think that on my nineteenth birthday I was a married woman with you on the way, and where will we all be in*



*another nineteen years? Perched in front of the fire at Field Head I hope but we shall probably be atom dust, a cheering Yuletide thought for us but it doesn't bother me really as long as we get a year or two with our yew tree. One is always inclined to be nostalgic at this time of year and forget the fuss and fret of Christmas at home and the vast sense of relief when it's over, if only it could be a quiet and contented time instead of a financial worry.*

*It's going to be quiet here, at least for us, Fiona will probably manage to whoop it up. She hasn't come back from her long lost week-end yet, our accountants leave in the morning and the jeep goes on to collect her. I fear she will be spoilt for the simple life as the Hannays<sup>219</sup> live in a very gay district and I'm sure their bungalow is like a palace, our visitors say they are shocked with the standards of the Assam Co bungalows but I must say I don't agree, palaces seem out of place when the coolies are living in one room earth houses. It has been quite amusing having them in a way as they are full of stories of the queer planters they've visited and known, Somerset Maugham would fill several note books and write half a dozen plays on them, and I must try and jot down some skeleton plots which I might work up in the long evenings of our retirement!*

*This is the next morning and they have gone, sighs of relief all round, in spite of being very nice I find it an effort trying to spur the cook on, teach Anne, and search for vegetables to feed the Indian who is a strict vegetarian. They seem quite confident that they'll be able to increase the company's profits into some dizzily unlikely figure, hope they're right. We took them into Nazira on Monday to see the film, "The Prisoner" with Alec Guinness, a wonderful film, sad but very moving and uplifting. Of course most of Nazira thought it damn depressing, why don't they give us a leg show – really they're a hopeless lot, beyond redemption. When I look round the bar of a Monday evening I really do wonder what the purpose is in creating characters like us, physically and mentally without an atom of grace.*

*I seem to have written dozens of letters home this last week, and really haven't anything more to say, no dramas among the beans and the animals all well, Miranda is barking now but I haven't actually heard her myself, her handsome suitor is getting quite tame and is recognized by the labour and treated with respect.*

*My Christmas cards have just arrived but I'm not sending them home as it's doubtful if they'll arrive now so apologies will have to be distributed all round. I'm writing this while Anne attempts a History essay, I'm following your advice and giving her one short essay to write each week on something we've done, she never forgets a fact or a date but can hardly write a coherent sentence, I can't help feeling the school could have taught her that much. Two more of her French tests arrived back, 96% and 98% which cheered us on our way.*

*Don't know whether to end with Christmas or New Year greetings, which ever's appropriate.*

*We all send lots of love, and are longing to hear any romances or scandals of the season.*

*All love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo December 27th 1960

*My dear Alan,*

*I hope this isn't very overdue, I wrote several letters in swift succession before Christmas and then seem to have gone into a state of suspended action. Your most amusing card arrived on Christmas Eve, plus letter, and we were glad to hear you had left your bed of sickness and ventured out into the slush. We do get a bit nostalgic for Yule logs and such like, but on the whole Christmas at home seems to have deteriorated into an orgy of eating and Telly and so I for one don't miss it all that much. Please don't think of sending us a present, partly because you will have little enough to spare, and partly because one has to pay 200% duty on anything that comes into the country and it just isn't worth it. When we next have a*

*Christmas together we will make it a really slap up affair, for the present all we need to see us through the year is the knowledge that you are happy and well.*

*We spent our day picnicking at the caravan site by the river, the Highams came with us, and three of the bachelors who were at a loose end. It was fun in a messy way, we ate ashy curry and played Peter Sellers records and lit a lot of unsuccessful little fires to make revolting tea and laughed a lot. The young swam and fell out of the canoe, the only blot on the day was a blown tyre on the way home but there were plenty of willing hands to change it and we were all ready for an early bed. Not exactly traditional, we didn't have a turkey or ham given us this year and I wasn't going to buy one, but it was nice. Everyone was very good to the girls and they had a tiny tree each one on each side of the fire.*

*The evening before there was dancing at the club, we actually persuaded Anne to take the floor but it wasn't a madly gay occasion and Daddy spent most of the time asleep in the back of the car! Fiona's heart-throb was away but she managed to fill in the time. We are all very enterprising on these occasions, it was just like any other club night and my suggestions about lighting a huge fire and bringing in bowls of nuts and sitting on cushions cracking them was greeted with raised eyebrows so that all that happened was a cluster of men round the bar and some ancient Pat Boone on the gramophone.*

*We had a carol service the evening before which was well attended but went on and on, apart from nine carols sung like dirges there were five Bible readings and an interminable sermon, Padre Wild is 75 and rather like Canon Bradley in his delivery, also only had two teeth but anyway it was nice to have a service at Christmas at all. Yesterday evening we rounded off the seasonal gaiety with a film, "Up the Creek" with Peter Sellers, disappointing I thought and like every other British comedy, with the jokes obvious for several minutes before they were made. It was the first time I'd seen Sellers and I wasn't impressed, not nearly as good as on his records.*

*Fiona is off to Moran for New Year's Eve, she's going with the Rigbys thank heavens as Daddy finds his fellow countryman too 'wa hae' for words on these occasions! In fact I hope our late nights are over for good now, Anne and I are supposed to be starting again tomorrow but I haven't done any of the work I intended to during the "hols" (only five days anyway). I'm afraid this is a disjointed letter but the girls are writing their Christmas thank-you's and are constantly asking me to suggest variations on the "how did you guess that purple bath salts was what I wanted most in the world" theme. I keep referring them to your card but to no avail.*

*Daddy is also sitting beside me reading excerpts on Levens Hall out of a magazine, how I envy men on these occasions, they never send a present or write a thank you letter and can't understand what the fuss is about. I have a very sore throat this morning which is dust I think, it's appalling at the moment and we got behind a lorry going to the club last night and of course Daddy couldn't bear to give in gracefully but drove a few feet behind tooting his horn the whole nine miles to Nazira while we all quietly choked to death.*

*I think you're right not to take your lessons<sup>220</sup> till the spring, what with the weather and lack of time. I believe you're going to Eastbourne<sup>221</sup> for a few days, then straight back to Oxford I presume. Will you let us know about the battels, and who we are supposed to send the money to, also the state of the grant? I would like you to have a big coat, duffel or some such for this term, perhaps you could get it at Oxford or Eastbourne, or there's Penrice in Ambleside, they had some nice navy ones. We will reimburse!*

*Please tell Granny I am writing, I must get a few of my local thank-you's off now. Do hope she and Grandpa kept well and Robert and Co managed to get over. My love to them and to Richard, and New Year's greetings to all and sundry, that's the day of David's party I think?*

*With lots of love and a very happy year ahead, Mummy*

1961

Iris to Alan, Early January 1961 [top of letter torn off]

*I have at last thrown off my bug, it has kept me pretty miserable the last week as I got a terrible tickle at night and couldn't sleep. However we've had rain at last to settle the dust and freshen things generally, quite a good shower on Thursday when Rosemary Lumley Ellis came to see me and say goodbye. As the bungalow leaks madly she had to pick her way through the puddles to her chair, I had just removed all the covers and a new bearer brought in our coffee with his coat inside out and the tea cosy sitting like a pimple on the coffee pot. But I don't suppose she minded, they leave Assam for good to-day, not widely mourned I'm afraid There was a farewell presentation to them on Monday at the club, usually these occasions are somewhat maudlin with handkerchiefs and "For he's a jolly good fellow" and lots of back slapping all roundabout this was embarrassingly lukewarm and nobody could raise as such as a weak cheer. Tom Darby gave a speech saying what a lot they had done for the district which was met with a positive gasp of disbelief! We all hope for better things now anyway.*

*Daddy and Anne and I spent a quiet New Year's Eve at home, as a matter of fact I saw the new year in cleaning the bathroom floor as Tessa was very sick, don't know what that portends, anyway I'm cynical about it as I read my diaries<sup>222</sup> and see how hopeful I am for the world and how catastrophic each new year turns out to be. Anyway enough of this gloom, it is a beautiful day, the scarlet shrub on the verandah is in full bloom and the air is full of mimosa. We're getting lots of lovely vegetables, and altogether don't have much to complain of.*

*I didn't finish this on Saturday, and got a letter from you to cheer me (us), you sound as if you've been having a gay time in spite of the weather and Fiona got very nostalgic reading about the gang though she feels now they're all Awfully Young!! She went up to Moran on New Year's Eve, with the Rigbys, and got home at 4.30 a.m. after a riotous evening. Even Anne is persuaded onto the dance floor now and then, and is going to make her debut at polo this afternoon, I'm not really madly keen on her playing such a nasty rough game but she is so keen I suppose I shall have to swallow my fears. Luckily her horse is too old to take a very active part in the proceedings.*

*Yesterday Seleng came down for an all day cricket match, we were just going to dump Fiona and come home as Daddy was feeling so lousy with his cold, but somehow we got involved and didn't get home till 4 p.m. Tim Edye was playing and actually took a wicket, the first since his prep school days, and we never heard the end of it. The match ended in a draw which was rather odd, 104 each.*

*We don't seem to have managed any serious fishing yet, mostly economy as with four of us basic, and the odd hanger on we need three boats, so when we go up the river we walk up to the island & throw in the odd spoon where there's hardly any chance of catching anything. Since reading "Salar the Salmon" I don't really want to catch a fish anyway!*

*I think you'll be back at Oxford by now but we still haven't heard how much we should send for your battels, I think the best thing would be to transfer some money into your account at Oxford & hope for the best. Fiona wants to add a line.*

*[Fiona] Glad to hear you had fun at Christmas. Everything seems much the same. I expect I shall hear it all in long detail from Anne Johnson. Have a good term and work.*

*[Iris] Sorry for a scrappy letter, seem to have constant interruptions, have a happy & successful term -*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 15th January 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Just got your letter from Oxford, and I'm glad you're safely back after a quiet period recuperating from the Gang! We were also delighted to hear you had passed the two more vital subjects in your Prelims, jolly good effort, as you say I don't suppose Latin is all that vital and I'm glad you haven't got to plod through Gibbon again. What are your books for this term? Actually I haven't quite fathomed what period you are doing, or don't you specialise yet? I'm sorry the finances are tricky, Daddy will send off the money to Worcester College pronto, and will write to the bank to-morrow asking them to transfer ten pounds to your account straight away and the other fifteen in a couple of weeks when he gets some advance commission. I'm sorry you've got to be bothered about finances, I know we still owe you a bit too, things should be easier when we have finished paying the girls' passages in three months' time. I expect your bank will let you overdraw by a few pounds if you're absolutely out.*

*I see you felt a bit like me about the promises of the new year, not a very thrilling world we brought you into but if one can be clear eyed about its muddles and disappointments and the vast confusion that is more than likely within our lifetimes, one can take the many small pleasures and add them into a reasonably contented life. The hardest thing is to reconcile it with the image of a just and loving God, although it should be easier for us who have so much more than the average.*

*Dinner is just coming in, so I must eat the inevitable fried fish, lovely, one of those small pleasures specially the fresh peas that go with it.... It wasn't fried it was steamed, but still nice. We have just come back from Nazira where Anne has played her second game of polo, it has been an exhausting day as the syce who was due to walk the pony in got drunk and didn't turn up this morning and Anne dropped large tears all over her notes on the results of the Hundred Years War so Daddy had to rustle up lorries and the horse had to be coaxed onto them and then we all sat and chewed our finger nails and thought of all the things that could go wrong between here and Nazira. Nothing did of course and Anne got her polo, she doesn't take a very active part in the game yet, which suits me but Daddy is forever urging her to get in and ride 'em off. It's very good for her morale I feel, and she's certainly the youngest player ever seen on a polo field in Assam. My only fear is that something happens to the horse as she lives for and on him, and does all his dirty chores with a shining devotion which I wish she could bring to her own washing and mending!*

*She and Fiona went for a picnic up the river with Terry and another assistant called Mike Lane<sup>223</sup> yesterday, and left me with hour after peaceful hour (Daddy went in to play golf). I spent them with a butterfly book and felt most rested and refreshed and quite a lot wiser about the butterflies. We only began to get a little worried when they still weren't home at eight p.m. and had to turn out to look for them, visions of drowned white faces floating before my eyes, but we came across them broken down on the main road with a burst tyre. Mike Lane is the blond giant who used to be in favour, but now that she has got him well into her sights Fiona has lost interest, just as well as he has resigned and will be leaving soon. All our young assistants are leaving, the prospects not being too pleasing and they all seem to miss coffee bars and Telly which I suppose is natural.*

*Lessons are going fairly well, I've given up flapping about exams and we're just taking our own time, I get moods of deep depression and then Anne writes an essay that brightens my day. She is beginning to get the feel of words but I absolutely refuse to teach her to make rigid little plans of essays, I'm reading her model ones and telling her to leap right into her subject feet first without any introductory paragraphs, surely the whole point is to interest, or*

*am I wrong? Shorthand is more or less stationary and typing completely but when the gay season is over perhaps we shall be able to concentrate.*

*The animals are well but Miranda has taken to attacking Anne and I if we go into her run without food, rather frightening actually as she has very sharp teeth and hooves and we have decided she isn't safe and must be let out. I don't know if she'll go that's the trouble!*

*Unpredictable as all women, I'm sorry Vivien treated you so offhandedly but girls are like that, as you must know by now, they must have their vanity tickled by constant fresh conquests. I hope you'll find one soon who can be a real friend, & not too Worthy either, let me know! Have a happy term – Much love Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 24th January. 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*A cold misty morning, we had the coldest night of the year, 49 degrees! I'm sitting on the verandah in the sun with a cup of tea, the best time of the day everything dripping with dew and birdsong and life almost static still. I haven't had a letter since I last wrote, don't bother, we don't expect one every week as I know you have far too much to do. Even here I find it hard to collect myself and my thoughts, I'm always so tired by the evening and the rest of the day too busy driving the girls into action.*

*Fiona went away to Moran for the weekend to stay with a girlfriend over their "spree", we went up for the day on Saturday, Anne sent her pony up but couldn't be fitted in to the competition, however I think enjoyed striding round in breeches and very bravely entered for the polo-ball race in which she came a persistent last but everyone was most impressed that she could hit the ball at all after only having been on the field twice. She is now thinking of taking up tennis and is asking for dancing lessons, a transformation!*

*There were three other girls at the spree and Fiona was in a tizzy at the thought of the competition but apparently Held Her Own at the dance and was dragged reluctantly home at three thirty a.m. Her next two week-ends will be occupied with similar junketings but then things will quieten down and I'm trying to get her some sort of work to do as six months of lotus eating is quite enough. I was bored stiff at Moran needless to say sitting in a myopic haze while dim horsy forms run backwards and forwards for six hours is more than a little monotonous but we had a nice lunch and met one or two old friends and got back in time to hear Scotland being beaten at Rugger. Are you playing by the way?*

*We spent a quiet day on Sunday, I'm trying to get down to a scientific study of butterflies so I can identify the one's Anne catches and this involves hours and hours poring over tiny print and complicated diagrams but I find it quite fascinating and miraculous that each one can be so exact and perfect to the last minute dot and vein. Dr Norman, our expert is leaving soon and apparently not taking his collection which contains every known specimen from this area and some new ones, I've been sending hints and messages flying up in his direction but no response so far, I expect he'll leave them to a museum.*

*Lessons are going along, Anne's French tests all come back marked "Excellent" but we haven't sent any English or History one's yet, we're drawing to the end of the Middle Ages and about to start Our Period so if you know or see any cheap second hand volumes on Tudors or Stuarts would be most grateful for same, sea mail with the ends open you can get them out cheap. It's annoying not to have any sort of library to refer to, I find the books I have each concentrate on a different aspect of History but none of them knit the social and political together satisfactorily, the best are the Penguins.*

*I wonder if Robert's book on Parliament is out yet, I must get him to send me a copy. Our only other excitements this week was Marilyn Monroe on Monday in "The Seven Year Itch", very amusing nonsense but cut as usual.*

*The big talking point is the Duke's twenty four hour visit to Jorhat next month, all the highborn ladies are taking out their long gloves and saying of course they don't intend to go even if they're asked, the poor man is going to be subjected to such a programme of stunning boredom with every dreary aged body for hundreds of miles being summoned to shake his hand, but I suppose he is used to it. I must say I find it rather nauseating that the government should be able to find thousands of rupees to do up roads and buildings and make things pretty for the Queen when normally they don't seem to have a spare penny, also think it nasty of them to kill tigers for her amusement but my views hardly count needless to say!*

*Our wild beast, Miranda, has suddenly turned very nasty and taken to attacking Anne and I when we go into her run, I think it's frustrated instincts and plan to let her go when it gets a little warmer as she could do a lot of damage if she really set her mind to it. I always heard barking deer were unreliable but thought love could conquer all.*

*The Cowans sent me "Ring of Bright Water" for Christmas which has filled us with the urge to buy a broken down croft in the outer Hebrides, if you go there this summer look out for something suitable for us, no roads or electricity naturally, the trouble is one would probably find a rocket station as one's next door neighbour in a year or two. But it's not a bad idea for our retirement all the same, there must still be derelict buildings we could retire to when we're letting Field Head at fifteen guineas a week*

*Well the dew has dried and the day is on me, so no more. I hope you are making ends come close if not actually meet, we will send the rest of the money at the beginning of next month. Fiona got a letter from Anne Johnson yesterday and she now HATES Simon, in case you're not up on latest developments.*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 1st February. 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Four months to-day since we left England, it seems to have gone in a flash and the first two I found very depressing, but now I'm beginning to adjust myself and reconstruct the pattern. No letter from you I think, or did the last one arrive just after mine went?*

*I envy you cosily ensconced in your room reading seventeen books on King Offa (is he the Mercian man we took a brief glance at when we did Saxon England?) As a matter of fact I feel somewhat chary about exposing my small brain and doubtful grammar to one whom I'm always reading about in magazines described as the Cream of the Country's brains (you). I've just finished an article in the Illustrated Weekly about universities and there you are, creamier than ever, the luckiest, cleverest brightest-futured class in the country. I hope you feel like that, not poor and hard-working, I expect it hits you both ways. We are all terribly proud of you anyway and never utter a sentence without mentioning our son-at-Oxford!*

*The cold weather festivities are grinding to a climax and close, Fiona has a heavy cold at the moment which has prevented her from going up to Jorhat as a member of Nazira's tennis team (B). I must say I never thought I'd see the day, nor did I think I'd see Anne playing polo or sitting engrossed in a historical novel as she is at present ("Katherine" about John of Gaunt, doubtful history and purple prose but madly authentic background and has at least aroused her imagination).*

*Fiona has been away for two weekends and is off for yet another on Friday, but she is making plans to get a job for the hot weather, either in Shillong or at the Kalimpong homes (near Darjeeling). She is becoming much less haywire and can look dispassionately at young men and find them bores which is a sign of growing up, she gets on very well with the local selection but nothing serious on any side, long may it last.*



*Last weekend we had another girl of her age to stay, and a thirteen-year-old who is out for her holidays so the bungalow rocked with girlish squeaks and Elvis Presley, rather fun. There was a two day company cricket matches and a dance, neither very thrilling but they got a kick out of it. Anne and the thirteen year old went to the dance, but came back pretty quick, Anne looks very pretty when she's dressed up and dances very well but is overcome with shyness and makes off if anyone looks like asking her.*

*We are working quite hard, I think this course expects quite a lot of her (being devised for adults) and she says she's learnt more French in two months than she did in two years at school (which isn't saying much I may add). The big excitement of the next couple of weeks is collecting some hats and gloves to meet the Duke of Ed. in a garden party on Jorhat cricket ground – can you think of a more regal setting? What with the cows and us in our home made cottons I feel it will be the Highlight of his tour, actually I don't want to go at all but the girls want the prestige value. There is to be a dinner party the evening before at which he was supposed to meet local planters but directors are flying out from home for it, can you credit it. I wish he hadn't had to shoot that tiger, which had obviously been fattened and led out in front of him.*

*We went up the river on Thursday, Republic Day, but not far. Daddy threw a spoon in and hooked a little one which got off, but the lower reaches of the river have been spoilt by people collecting stone and we never seem to have any rupees over for boats to go further.*

*Daddy is just about to sell his gun, so there goes our last simple pleasure, and then the company wonder why all the young men are resigning when they see us in our state of poverty after twenty five years of hard work. Never mind, I won't depress you further, we will send the other fifteen pounds this month, in fact now, when do you start your vac? I'm glad you got "Cider with Rosie" as I shall be able to read it again, one of the few books I want to. I've just read "Don't Tell Alfred" by Nancy Mitford which is most amusing, an ideal antidote to King Offa. Granny sent it to me for Christmas.*

*I'm off this morning to play bridge, a thing I never do but I've been bludgeoned into it, and am leaving Anne with a French Test, she has never got less than 96% for any of her tests to date but we are rather making a Thing of French as I want her to go to France and become really fluent, add a bit of shorthand and the world's your oyster.*

*Must Do the House & get Fiona organised for the morning, they all send lots of love & messages which I've no room for - & all mine comes too - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo 6th February. 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter received a couple of days ago, as usual I've lost track of when I last wrote and what I said, have given up keeping a diary since I came back so hope I don't repeat myself too often. There isn't a great deal of news these days, my mornings and afternoons being devoted to subordinate clauses and the Wars of the Roses and the rest of the day to picking a hundred and fifty tomatoes, we have a wonderful crop but the girls manage to eat fifty a day apiece so my plans to make bottles of chutney have so far been foiled.*

*I was interested to hear of your studies, my idea of heaven would be to browse through old manuscripts picking out the pith and drawing conclusion, I wonder if anyone will have gone through those Levens Hall letters before we retire! Couldn't you spend part of your long vac grubbing about for evidence, or would that be too much of a busman's holiday? I haven't had time or opportunity to do any more excavating since I came back, haven't even been able to get anyone to go down the hole the driver's cow fell down and at the bottom of which he says there is a brick ruin. I don't fancy going down myself in case the whole thing caves in, it*

*really needs proper digging away from the sides but alas the days when one could use the coolies for that sort of thing are over.*

*I will bring one of my pots home for dating this time. Who is your tutor, is he old or young, sympathetic or eccentric? I wish I could have an hour with him a week, I'm hysterically hurrying through Fisher trying to piece together European history so that we don't suddenly land in the middle of the Renaissance without any idea of what went before, but it's a formidable business and I have my doubts about Anne's passing it. Never mind, she'll have her polo to fall back on! We went in yesterday, there was no polo as all the ponies are up at Jorhat taking part in Race Week competitions, so Anne had the field to herself and was whacking some pretty balls. I tried to play golf, conspicuously unsuccessfully, and when Anne had finished her riding she joined me and proceeded to whack the golf balls with equal abandon into the middle distance, sickening!*

*Fiona spent the weekend with the Edyes and had a good time as far as I can gather though her favourite man up there had broken his ankle which put him out of the running rather. She joined us at Nazira for the film, a ghastly British thriller-comedy, which was neither, called Checkpoint. It was all about the Le Mans car race, and was nothing but oafish men in overalls making schoolboyish jokes and getting drunk just before the start. Unfortunately they none of them got run over and only the crook fell into Lake Lucerne and sank, which was a pity as he was the only one who could act too.*

*I wish we could get some of those films you mention, but the chances are too remote to consider. I have read "Of mice and men" and thought it wonderful, one of the few books that I remember and have haunted me, but I haven't read any other of Steinbecks. I'm still reading my otter book and trying to spin it out, but I wish I had read it before I took on my otter as I would never have made the mistake of trying to take a full grown animal away from its owner, they simply die being far more affectionate and intelligent than dogs. I wonder if the book will do anything to stop otter hunting at home, I hope so.*

*The tempo is mounting as the Duke of Ed. approaches, but Daddy and Anne and I have decided we can't be bothered to go and given our tickets to our assistant, nobody can understand us but I feel shocked at the time, trouble and money that is being devoted to this by a community that never has any to spare for welfare work of any description. But that is spiritual pride I suppose, though heavens knows I do little enough.*

*I was supposed to be going to speak at a meeting on Sunday to encourage backward rural women (What encouragement I was supposed to give them I don't know, as they are obviously far happier than us forward ones) but now I find we have the Lobbans coming to lunch and the rural women must manage without my encouragement, it a very difficult to sort out one's loyalties!*

*We have an Anglo-Khasi girl coming to stay with on Friday for two days, she is the one who teaches at the convent in Shillong where Fiona may go for the hot weather, I hope F. does pull it off as I rather dread having her at a loose end through the hot weather. She has just got a long letter from Anne Johnson saying Martin was forming a band, whether as amusement or a career I can't make out, but I don't think he's good enough to make a career of it is he? I must say I'm glad Fiona is out of that gang, she is much more sensible now she is with more mature people and is wondering if she won't even find art students terribly Young!*

*I see there is an art school much advertised in Oxford, but I imagine the accommodation question is impossible isn't it? It would be nice if you could both be there cashing in on each other's friends, or would it be ghastly? I do hope you aren't finding yourself too short of money, the enclosed will tide you on a bit I trust, will it last till the end of the term (?) or not? I know you must be short, but I hope things will improve gradually, I'm sure they will, anyway your second and third years we should be able to help more. Daddy has just said*

*hang onto it for a couple of days before you cash it if you can – but I daresay the bank can stand the strain otherwise.*

*Much love, don't get The Asian [flu] Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 18th February. 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*I've kept this over to tell you the only Big News for years –the Duke's visit but alas nobody scratched anyone else's eyes out or tried to assassinate him or was sick when they were being presented, in fact it all went off dismally well. We didn't go but Fiona did, she was driven up with the Lobbans after much feverish stamping up and down in front of the mirror in borrowed hat and gloves. She finally wore her beige duster coat and pink dress with a crushed strawberry hat (very crushed by the time she got it home that night) and though she got terribly close he never actually spoke to her! The stories that have filtered back are that he is shy, completely at ease, very ordinary, terribly regal, brown and tanned, rather spotty, dressed in blue, wearing a grey lounge suit – you can take your pick. I shall no doubt hear another selection at the club this afternoon.*

*The Edyes were presented amongst others, and apparently there were guns poking from behind every bush so it's lucky he got away with his life knowing the Assam Police. There was a dinner party the evening before at which the uninhibited Aberdonian Burra Memsahib<sup>224</sup> talked so penetratingly at the other end of the table that the Duke leant over and said icily that she seemed to be having a very interesting conversation, it sounds a bit like our headmistress and I'm sure the poor dear was only doing her nervous best to keep things going. Of course everyone produced unlikely hats and it must have been quite funny but I didn't regret not going, Fiona got in at 10 p.m. (the party was at 10 a.m.) and we had heard on the five o'clock news that the Duke had arrived back in Calcutta so you can imagine it was an excuse for a beat up. Fiona was off again to another party on Saturday and got back at 3 a.m. this morning, looking black under the eyes but protesting herself to be as fresh as a daisy. However she's gone to bed this afternoon, the thought of shorthand made her realise that she was in fact exhausted, although she will be up in a minute to get ready for tennis and another late night at our own club. We still haven't heard about her job, but it's high time she got down to something more elevating, or do I meant got up to?*

*Awful mess and confusion here as we are at last having the roof taken off, and no sooner have they got the thatch down than huge black clouds roll up, goodness knows what we shall do if it does pour with rain. Hundreds of bearded carpenters are hammering away and dust and straw is settling on us all and giving me hay fever, its rather sad to see the thatch go and horrid glaring tin in its place but I suppose one has to move with the times. This is the next morning and the confusion is worse and the clouds blacker but no rain as yet.*

*We saw the most extraordinary film yesterday, "It happened in Rome", a whole lot of amateurs wandering around Europe mouthing their lines, it really was odd, nothing happened and not a single member of the cast had the faintest idea how to act. This evening the girls and I are going to a festival of music at Sibsager, I hope there'll be plenty of dancing and not too many spotty bespectacled girls twanging primitive two-stringed instruments. Daddy has no ticket needless to say.*

*I had rather a wearing week-end as I had a mother with two small children for the day on Saturday, the two Leetham children for the whole weekend, and the Rosses for lunch on Sunday. My chief worry was the animals who are liable to bite, claw or pierce with their hooves (Miranda) but by locking them and the children up in turns we got through without any dramas.*

*Betty Ross is hectically blonde but otherwise much the same, they and all the other parents are very pleased as the company is now paying half school fees for children under 18, we would miss the boat going in every direction! Never mind I enjoy teaching Anne, we have come to the end of the Middle Ages and are making a vast chart with all the main events, statutes etc. marked in different coloured inks which is great fun and I hope useful. I find Fisher fascinating and feel very superior knowing who the Wends are but find it difficult to introduce them into normal conversation! If you ever see a good 2nd hand biography of Wolsey I would love it (don't spend more than a shilling on it) I feel he is the Key Figure of the Tudor age. Strangely enough we never did the Tudors that I remember and my knowledge of them is based on old films about Henry VIII throwing chicken bones over his shoulder.*

*There are signs of spring here, the peach blossom is out and very beautiful and birds are dashing about building nests, everything is so much noisier and bigger here than at home but not as exciting. We will send some money for your holidays, I hope you won't be too short, perhaps you could take a job for a week or two if you are, Martin still doesn't seem to be settled but David has worked himself into advertising I gather. I hope Granny and Granpa avoid flu which is taking its toll of the old but it always sounds worse than it is. Everyone sends love & promises to write & lots from me – Mummy.*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 1st March 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter written on that lovely spring day among the crocuses, I remember the Worcester College gardens so well, but never thought you would be sitting there as part of the landscape so to speak. Strangely enough your talk of sun and warmth made us quite envious as we have been having terrific rain, hail and wind, normally most gratefully received but just at the moment quite catastrophic as we have half the roof off the bungalow. We have been crouching round the dining room fire, pulling off our shoes and rolling up our trousers at intervals to make sorties into the flooded areas and erect dams at strategic spots. If only the rain had held off for a day or two more we should have been through, now it is a holy festival and nobody will be working so we shall be hard at it with our brooms until Monday. Now that we have aluminium the noise of rain is deafening and the hail sounded like the end of the world and sent both cats diving head first into the china cupboard, chaos. Never mind, we shall be thinking of it nostalgically in a month or two and at least everything is getting a nice clean down.*

*Our twentieth wedding anniversary to-day, the girls are both going out to a bachelor's party so we shall celebrate it like Darby and Joan with a bottle of whisky we have saved since Christmas. Fiona is off to Shillong any moment, we had a wire yesterday saying "Come immediately" and we're now running round thinking how best to get her there. I'm glad in a way, but have slight qualms about letting her launch forth on her own, she is much more sensible than she was six months ago and as she will be living in the convent Rev. Mother will be able to keep an eye on her. She is to teach Art, which will give her practice even if nobody else profits very much from it. It's all by way of an experiment actually, she may loath it or they her, but if it works she'll be cold and independent for the hot weather and Anne and I will be able to get down to do more serious work.*

*Our chief entertainment this week was a visit to a musical festival at Sibsager. We only had three tickets so the girls and I went on Tuesday, left at 6.30 and got back at 1.30 a.m. with the programme only half over, it was to go on all night. They had erected a vast bamboo structure and there must have been several thousand people there and most of the programme was very good, dancing and drumming by various types of people, some*

*charming Nepalese folk songs, and a real live film star from Madras who did some classical Indian dances and was very pretty.*

*The only ghastly thing was a fat gent who sat cross legged in front of the microphone and moaned for an hour and a half. He had his disciples grouped round him, all leaning on two-stringed instruments and gazing at him in rapt adoration and every time he stopped to draw breath one of the wretched disciples took over, we were laughing so much I thought we would have to go out, we kept thinking how Peter Sellers would take him off. Poor man, he was the best of whatever he was in India, or one of the best, let's hope I never have to hear the better! Actually I think it was wrong of us to laugh as we don't understand that type of music, but nobody else in the audience did either and took the opportunity of scratching and greeting their friends but The Master was not put off alas. We spent the week end at home, the first time Fiona has done so and she found it a grim ordeal!*

*On Monday it was the Annual General Meeting at the club and all the men disappeared so we played bridge, Daddy got himself voted onto the committee which was a bit silly of him as I had made up my mind not to go to the club again after Fiona left. The new moves have come out and we are losing our assistants the Leethams which is a pity as they are nice and young and also keen bridge players, all the senior assistant are being put back into factories much to their rage, in an effort to make some profits. I don't think anybody minds, if we do make the profits, but they have a mysterious way of disappearing into directors' pockets or "our African holdings"<sup>225</sup> which I have a sneaking suspicion means the same thing!*

*Talking of money, Daddy has sent some home and I will send you a cheque for £10 the day after to-morrow to start you off on your holidays, let us know exactly how long the vac lasts won't you, and how things are going in that line. I think your idea of teaching in the long vac is a good one, it'll give you an idea as to whether you would like that as a career. But will a prep school take you for five weeks? The Outer Hebrides sounds delicious too, see if you can find a broken down croft for us to buy as a retreat when the pace gets too hot at Field Head.*

*I must go and cope with the flood waters and find a corner somewhere in the bungalow away from them and the deafening hammering of ten Sikh carpenters on the tin roof, for Anne and I to work in.*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

Donald to Alan, Cherideo 4th March. 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Mummy asked me to send you the enclosed as she has gone out for the day. I hope that it will tide you over for a little and I shall try and send some more during the month. What a business this finance all is and I am sorry that we can't, at the moment, make things easier for you. Mummy has no doubt told you that we are in the midst of changing our bungalow roof from thatch to tin. The result has been chaos and my nerves are somewhat shattered. The end is in sight now and we are all longing for some peace and quiet from the ear splitting hammering the wretched carpenters produce. Both Mummy & myself were nearly brained as large pieces of beams came hurtling through the ceiling cloth.*

*Fiona has landed herself a job in Shillong in some Convent School as the Art Mistress! Heavens knows what will happen, we have our fingers crossed and hope that Shillong will survive. It will keep her amused which is the main thing and she will miss the hot weather. Annie will have her work, her horse and her thumb so she will be alright. Today they have all gone up to the Lobbans for bridge in the morning, tennis in the afternoon and the film "Five Pennies" in the evening. I am supposed to meet them at the Club this evening. I hope it's not late as I have to take Fiona over to another garden. She has got a lift to Shillong with the*

*Bardelois and they are leaving at 4 AM sharp! Probably end up by going straight on from the Club.*

*I enjoy getting your letters immensely and love hearing all about your activities both scholastic and social. It must be a wonderful life and I wish that I could have managed to go.*

*My letter now comes to an end, what a feeble effort, however it takes all our love, have a good holiday,*

*Lots of love, Daddy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo March 17th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*I think you will be home again by now, refreshed physically and mentally and ready to appreciate the daffodils which must be blooming Wordsworthily everywhere (my typewriter seems to have gone haywire this morning, or perhaps it's the typewriter after Fiona's efforts). We are having an incredible spring here with torrential rain (2 and a half inches last night), hail, the odd cyclone and the temperature ten degrees below normal. The sun is shining for the first time for a couple of days, the roads are under water as if it was the middle of the rains. I fear we are in for floods but better than another drought. We're having a wonderful mushroom crop as a result, we go out and pick a basket full twice a day and with strawberries to follow our diet is (temporarily) exotic.*

*Not a very exciting week to report, life is settling down into a routine to my pleasure but not Fiona's, however she is much more philosophical than she was.*

*Last week end Daddy and I deserted the girls and spent the Saturday night with the Simpsons<sup>226</sup> (new G.M.) and went up to Jorhat with them on Sunday where the men played golf, and we bridge. During the Saturday evening she and I discovered that we had been at the same school together at Guildford for two years, in fact in the same form – she was a quiet mousey girl, mildly despised by the rest of us, ironic that she should now be my Burra Mem! It was a rather a painful week end altogether as he is a man without any conversation outside his work and an un-nerving habit of drumming on the table loudly when he's bored, he also had a heavy cold which didn't help things along.*

*On Sunday evening there was a show put on by K.L.M. at the club, everyone thought it was going to be a cabaret and about 2,000 people turned up but it was only lantern slides of Holland introduced by two rather attractive Dutch girls who went off afterwards with their husbands! There were free drinks for a bit and we finally got home at 3.15 (it was at Jorhat club). On the way back we passed a jeep overturned by the side of the road, it had its lights on, and lots of blood in it and two left-hand shoes lying by it – all the settings but no bodies I'm glad to say. We've never heard who was in it or why.*

*The rest of the week was quiet until Saturday when there was tennis at the Burra Bungalow, luckily there was a short pause in the rain and Anne played, she is going to be very good if she doesn't get discouraged. I sat on the verandah stuffing and talking to the Bishop's wife, he is a South Indian and she is very nice and was full of ideas about Fiona, since I wrote to the Principal of the school at Kalimpong he and his wife have been involved in a car accident in which the wife was badly injured poor thing – so it looks as if that scheme will peter out too. I would like to get Fiona settled to something definite, the rest of us are busy most of the time and she does her best to keep occupied but it isn't always easy.*

*We were all interested in your Hungarian friend,<sup>227</sup> as you say Oxford must be a hard place to hold a girl but I hope you'll manage to do so for a short while anyway as she sounds most unusual and interesting – a bit terrifying too with a brain like that, what is she reading? It's so hard to find anyone who measures up to one's impossible standards of beauty, brains, and nice nature and life must necessarily be a series of compromises, but just occasionally a*



*figure appears to fit exactly. And alas disappears again rapidly in most cases but leaves you with the happy knowledge that there may be more like her or him.*

*Your spiritual reawakening I can only be glad about for your sake, it's something that seems beyond my range of experience now, perhaps because it's an experience implicit in Christianity and slightly suspect in the Perennial Philosophy – not that I'm decrying it but having been won over by the concept of patient self-discipline and self-denial as the way to happiness, emotional "giving of the heart to Jesus" is just meaningless, though I can see that stripped of the luxuries of sacrifice and prayer the two could mean the same thing. Anyway if youth is not the time for messages and awakenings what is? If only the message could be conceived and delivered in a broadly human way instead of a narrow religious one. I'm not in the least embarrassed to discuss religion by the way, it's one of my favourite topics, inexhaustibly interesting because there seems no final answer that fits the state of the world.*

*To more mundane topics, I hope you passed your exams, what if you didn't? To more mundane still, I'm sending Granny a cheque by sea mail, she doesn't seem to have got my last letter. We'll have to send her something for your keep so hope the £15 can be spun out as far as possible, I know you'll do your best. Gather Martin has had a crash poor Beryl, thank heavens our worries are only money ones! Much love to all from us all – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 28th March 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*We were delighted to hear from Granny that you had passed the beastly Latin, what a relief, does that mean that you are finished with it for good? I don't think we had a letter this week, as you were travelling, but I trust all went well and you're feeling really refreshed in every way. We envy you the flurries of snow, after wonderfully cool and frantically wet spell the hot weather is on us, on 87 degrees yesterday but humid and we're not yet adjusted to it. We shall get into the rhythm of a new sort of life soon and the time will pass in a flash, far too fast for all the work we've got to fit in.*

*We had the last "spree" of the cold weather on Saturday, at good old Sonari which is about to be pulled down. After a night of drenching rain it cleared and became very warm, and both the girls played tennis all day, ten sets altogether, I thought they were going to have heat exhaustion but Fiona went on to dance till 3 a.m. Anne was supposed to be taking her pony but the wretched animal refused to get on the lorry, the more love and time she gives it the snappier and more obstinate it gets, beastly things horses. Anyway was perhaps as well as the polo was pretty fast and as the ground was wet there was permanently someone sprawled on it. Anne very bravely entered the tennis tournament but the partners were drawn out of a hat and she drew another woman so they battled bravely to get the booby prize. She is going to be very good if she sticks at it and we can get her a racket, at present she is using Daddy's which weighs a ton and has every other string broken. We didn't stay to the dance afterwards but Fiona enjoyed herself among the usual mass of men and shortage of women, she got back at 4.30 a.m. having assisted in the pulling out of various cars from drains en route.*

*She is now feeling rather flat as there is nothing more in the way of organized jollity we still haven't heard from Kalimpong but hope to any day. I haven't arranged anything for her birthday on Saturday, but she wants it that way, it's rather difficult to have a party when there are no other girls anyway. We had the last (I think) of the polo matches too, last Wednesday, the Assam C. being beaten by the Jorhat, but only just and only because they had a change of horses.*

*Now everyone is thinking of getting down to some work, we start manufacturing here next week and Daddy is madly preoccupied as we only have Terry here who doesn't know a nut*

*from a bolt, however another more senior assistant arrives in a few days, though in actual fact I think Daddy rather enjoys carrying the whole garden on his shoulders.*

*Anne and I took our Easter Hols last week (three days) and are now starting in earnest on our syllabus, when I think that I had three different Maths, Latin and Geography to learn on top of what she's doing it makes me feel she's getting off pretty lightly but even so I don't know if we shall get through! We started "Jane Eyre" yesterday which is pure pleasure, but I wish we had something more inspiring than "Twelfth Night" to do, I hate the puns and the taunting of Malvolio and all those dreadful old men. We are launched at last into the Tudors, I try to keep one king ahead and while we're doing Henry VII I'm mugging up the breach with Rome, I was in the middle of reading about the dreadful Borgia Popes when we had the Catholic Priest, Father James, a Spaniard to stay the night. We got involved in long (very good natured) arguments on the subject, fruitless of course, and then he sang for us. His uncle is a famous opera singer with La Scala, and he has the most beautiful voice, quite untrained, but it almost had me in tears. He speaks seven languages, plays three instruments, and spends his life in broken down buses going to visit little communities of catholics twenty or thirty strong – it seems a strange waste but he is happy and I suppose satisfied that his talents were not meant to be used. He was a most interesting guest, a very vivid talker with grim stories to tell of life under the communists, and it was altogether an unusual evening and such a relief from the usual tea talk.*

*Please thank Granny for sending the book, and also the "Boyfriends" which Anne is thrilled with. Daddy wants to add a line to this so I'll leave him some room, so sorry to hear about Martin's do with Gran's car, not his fault which makes it worse. I do hope he'll start taking a career more seriously soon.*

*[My father] Well done passing your Latin, like Mummy I haven't the faintest what that means but hope you haven't got any more of the beastly things to cope with. Life warming up and becoming interesting, I have never known a cold weather go so quickly. We shall be planning to come home again soon. Hope you have a decent hols, Lots of love from us all, Daddy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo 6th April 1961. [It was posted to Field Head and redirected to 'V.P.S. Party, Claysmore, Iwerne Minster, Dorset', and date stamped in Ambleside on 12 April].*

*My dear Alan,*

*Goodness knows where you will be now, or what doing, I still don't know in fact how long the vac is, I thought it was eight weeks but judging by your letter to Fiona it can't be as you only plan to have ten days at home. Perhaps you will be going back to Oxford early, I hope the money will last but this travelling is expensive unless you can hitch hike or go by bus, anyway I suppose Granny will have helped you out if you were short. I expect we'll be getting answers to all the questions any day and meanwhile will try to get something into your bank to tide you over till your next bit of grant arrives. I'm going to make enquires of the council to see if Fiona can get a grant for an Art School and perhaps if you meet anyone connected with the one at Oxford you could do a little enquiring about that too i.e. is there any hostel or what not attached to it and how difficult is it to get into and are the students madder or badder than most?! We still haven't heard anything about her other job but luckily it's also still incredibly cool here, we have a fire and cardigans which is probably cooler than you, we have had one or two hot days but then it breaks and the temperature drops with the first crash of thunder.*

*Life is pretty quiet now, the painters and plasterers have departed and our chief concern has been the horse, which developed cracked heels into which (at Daddy's suggestion) we poured turpentine to kill any maggots which might have developed. We succeeded instead in burning all the skin off one leg (fortunately not both, otherwise I can't think what would have*

*happened) so the wretched animal has been in agonies since, and Anne and I have daily battles to dress the leg without getting our teeth kicked out (I suppose I could take the precaution of removing mine first!). I hope it'll heal before too long as it means he can't be ridden either. Oh for a vet. The other livestock are well thank heavens, but the hot weather is always a trying time for skin troubles, tummy upsets, ticks, leeches etc. so I expect the worst. I still can't bring myself to release Miranda.*

*Fiona's birthday last Saturday went off quietly, she didn't want a party (no girls) but we went into tennis at the Burra Bungalow and a couple of the lads came back to supper plus gramophone so it was midnight before we got to bed anyway.*

*We listened to the Boat Race during the course of the evening, what a tragedy, I haven't read a full account of it yet.<sup>228</sup> Your birthday letter was most welcome. Strange to think it was in my seventeenth year that I met Daddy, how quickly the old routine starts up again. How is the "old routine" going with you? Do send us a snap of Juliana if you can get one, I hope it flourishes but it must be a tooth and claw struggle in Oxford – good luck to you anyway.*

*Sunday was our film, I can't remember what it was called even, "the value of money" I think, not bad but rather a drippish Diana Dors-ish British comedy, we get little else, the planter mentality being catered for I suppose. However we're getting our mental stimulation through reading "Jane Eyre" is our set book which is the big moment of the day and the whole family gathers round to listen, and I'm reading "The Leopard" to myself which is enchanting. I have at last got the Italian Wars sorted out and am waiting for Green (I've sent for a copy so don't bother) before plunging into the Reformation proper. According to John Lampett who is an honours graduate, the way to pass exams is to know one part of your syllabus really well and not attempt to finish it, so I'm going to get dug into the Tudors and European History and leave the Stuarts for the last couple of months. Where are you at now? Wish I was closer as I'm sure you could be invaluable!*

*Daddy is madly busy with the manufacturing season just starting, and the new G.M. sweeping as hard as any new broom has ever done, I should think several of the old managers will crack under the strain, Tom Darby for instance who has spent ten happy years playing polo, shooting and letting the tea look after itself with ghastly results. The sad thing is that we have to suffer for his negligence as his losses come off our commission, ah well never mind, only five more years.*

*What a dull letter, I don't feel very sparkling this morning although it's a beautiful day with everything humming and glittering and singing, spring in Oxford will be wonderful too especially if you're in love, will you be able to hire a dinner jacket for the balls says she prosaically?*

*We all send lots of love for a happy term,  
Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo April 22nd 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*It seems a long time since we heard, but I expect your exertions in Iwerne have kept you busy and now you'll be back at Oxford, armed with some more of your grant I hope. Granny sent us a large bill so I hope with what she gave you and we sent you were all right, I presume so as we got no word, what about last term's battels? Let us know what they are, and I'll have to drop a line to the bursar if there's going to be any delay in paying them. As you said in your last letter, the thought of taking a useless but well paid job is odious, but a continual shortage of money is almost more so – it's hard to find a compromise! I should think the sort of job that would satisfy and yet keep body and soul and family together would be with one of the U.N. organizations – the British Council or something like that which*

would give an opportunity to travel as well. But I suppose that sort of job is very sought after. No harm in trying though.

April nearly over, and it's still quite cool, sorry to harp on the weather all the time, but it's our chief pre-occupation for about six months of the year. We had one or two fiery days and turned on the Air Conditioner, but the rain has come again and we haven't even got fans now. Fiona is still with us, and we still haven't heard about a job for her, but she is somewhat stimulated in her Shorthand and Typing by hearing that the oil people at Digboi are paying typists Rs. 600 a month, plus bungalows and transport, alas I think she has left it too late, if she had tried hard she would have been trained by now. However she's doing some very good sketches and paintings and I'm sure has a bright future in that line – don't forget to make enquiries about the Art School will you? I think I'll write to them too. It all depends whether we can get a grant for her.

Anne and I seem to be dawdling a bit with our work, we're supposed to do two hours in the afternoon but what with falling asleep and then being too hot to concentrate, it isn't very easy. Sometimes I feel very confident and at another times quite hopeless, anyway whether she passes the wretched exam or not I can't believe this year has been wasted. In history we seem to be taking a terrible long time sorting out the Renaissance and the Italian Wars and haven't started Henry VIII yet, admirable as is Mr Fisher, he presupposes knowledge that I haven't got and I have to read each chapter at least three times before I can sort it out! We have nearly finished Jane Eyre and enjoyed it so much that I rather wish we hadn't got to go through it again dissecting and making character studies.

Apart from work and weather there isn't really much to report – a couple of feeble films, some tennis and a few games of bridge. Nazira club is incredibly boring these days, only a couple of young men left and everyone droning dejectedly round the bar with nothing to talk about. Fiona is going away for a week to Digboi which will give her a change of scene and a nice swimming pool, I couldn't persuade Anne to go, the thought of meeting and conversing with a whole lot of new faces was too much for her. Her horse's foot is nearly better thank goodness but the dogs are now breaking out into their usual hot weather skin troubles and Daddy working himself up to a nervous breakdown, there is panic in the company as three of the gardens between them made a loss of £100,000 last year and the new G.M. is hurtling around like a demented creature lashing everyone to further efforts, it will be interesting to see if he and they can stand the pace. Our young assistant Terry has no intention of staying more than the first three years of his contract, and is only interested in making money and doing as little as he can so is absolutely useless to Daddy, luckily he (Daddy) thrives on hard work and crises.

Twelve o'clock and we have an accountant coming to lunch so I must go and see if the cook's remembered – he is as gaga as ever and deafer if anything, I keep feeling I must get rid of him but he now has four children so I know quite well I can't. Sorry for such a boring letter, we live such completely different lives at the moment that it's hard to find points of interest. I do hope you'll have a happy and succesful term and your love life will go smoothly, Juliana sounds enchanting and most unusual, just my sort of person in fact but I won't be too enthusiastic in case it's all a Thing of the Past by now.

Here comes the accountant – help.

With much love to you form us all, Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo May 1st 1961

My dear Alan,

The most beautiful morning, almost as beautiful as a May morning at home. It's half past six and only the dogs and cats and I are up (and Daddy of course who goes down to his office

at about five these days). It has been raining heavily all night and now the sun is starting up a million rainbows, every blade of grass has its own and the rubber trees are dazzling. The Naga Hills are emerging from veils of mist, as beautiful as brides – well it's a lovely morning and makes me wonder why I'm not up every day at this time. Actually we all do get up pretty early, Anne often rides before breakfast but today she is flat out as we had a late night on Sunday. It was our film night, and afterwards I got involved in a long argument with some of the engineers on the oil pipeline – typical smug, ignorant British middle classes, who presumed to criticize everything here without knowing a word of the language – ugh they irritated me. They seemed to think that no country without Telly and frozen foods was fit to be thought civilized, one of them kept saying "They're savages that's all, they won't catch up with us for 400 years if ever" and I nearly threw the two dozen eggs I was holding in his self-satisfied face. Anyway the result was that we were the last to leave the club and didn't get home till nearly one, there was a film first, "Passionate summer" which we rather enjoyed, not much passion but a pleasant cast and set in Jamaica which looked gorgeous.

Fiona arrived back from her stay at Digboi yesterday, very reluctant to leave its swimming pools, Chinese restaurants and bevy of handsome young men. We had to get her back a day early as we had a letter from a school in Shillong saying they would take her as a pupil teacher and wanting her at once. Luckily there is a company car going up any day, so she will be taken from door to door, goodness knows how she'll like it, it may be frightful but it's worth trying. At least she'll have other girls of her own age and be occupied and out of the heat, though it doesn't look as if we're going to get much of that. We moved into the Air Conditioned room but haven't had to put it on yet and Sunday was positively chilly, we were wearing cardigans for breakfast. The only hot day was last Wednesday when they had the last of the polo matches, we won and what with excitement and cups of tea I nearly blew up. If only we had a pool.

Work continues, how I wish I could join you in your sessions with your new tutor, European history muddles me terribly, specially the religious wars, I only have Fisher who is wonderful but too difficult to read to Anne without constant pauses for elucidation. We seem to be spending an awful long time on the Henries but as it brings in the Renaissance and Reformation I suppose that's fair enough. Anne is trying hard and improving so much in every other way that I don't worry too much, the problem is what to do with her next year, she has no definite ideas and ours only run along lines of economy!

Which reminds me, don't feel guilty about the guitar, we did owe you something and we don't want to be paid back. I will send the battels this month, will write to the Bursar my usual conciliatory letter, this should be the last time we're late as there'll be a good gap before we have to fork out again. I think the best thing for you would be to get a job on a farm for a month as soon as you leave Oxford, out in the open air with no mental work involved, it would give you just the change and rest you need and something in your pocket for the rest of the vac. I could write to the Langworthys<sup>229</sup> if you like and see if they know of anything.

Let's hope that the summer lives up to your expectations, to be young and in love and at Oxford must be just about a perfect state of affairs, I shouldn't worry about taking things too seriously, you're certainly too young to think of marriage but surely just at the age to do nothing else? Anyway whatever happens (and one must leave these things in the hands of God surely?) it is one of the major pleasures of life to find someone who thinks and feels the same way as oneself, there are precious few, in my whole life I've only met half a dozen. I only wish you could have more to spend on Julie, not that she minds I'm sure but it would be nice, ah well at least you're learning that money is not to be scoffed at, much as one would like to.

*I envy you your reading of the Greeks, I've promised myself that for the long evenings of our retirement, while I'm out here I want to read local and Indian history and philosophy – when I've got time. That's silly, I know I could make time by getting up earlier, but when the girls go I don't intend to go to the club or waste time with people that don't interest me and shall spend a happy four years browsing. It's strange that all one's life one is plagued by a sense of ignorance and time passing and the faster it passes the more ignorant one becomes.*

*The bearers have arrived and it has clouded over and I must wake the girls and start my chores. They both send their love regularly, Fiona is turning into quite a reasonable person actually, I think you'll enjoy her company, for the first time ever!*

*Daddy sends his too, he is terribly busy just now – and of course all mine, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo May 13th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*So glad to get your letter describing a more successful outing with Julie, it sounded idyllic in fact and made me very homesick, last May was so beautiful though of course you missed it being in Norway but I shall never forget it. We can't really complain of it here, it's still very cool and the flowering trees are coming out and transforming Nazira P.O. into a dream of beauty, all the birds are nesting and there are flashes of blues and golds as they fly about with food for their young and every open patch of ground is a lilac sea of water hyacinths. Oh to be a painter with the power of transforming and interpreting this riot of life and colour, I would rather be able to paint than anything else though I suppose of all the arts it would be the most frustrating as you could never interpret the moment exactly as it was, the tricks of light and shade and the feelings they evoked.*

*We got Fiona up to Shillong at last, we hung about for days and days waiting for a company car that was supposed to be going up and eventually decided to fly her to Gauhati as being the cheapest and simplest way – it would have been too if the plane hadn't been an hour and a half late so that she missed the last connection up the hill to Shillong and had to spend the night in Gauhati. (That godforsaken spot where we got the ferry to cross the Brahmaputra to go up the Manas). As you can imagine I was frantic with worry visualizing her pacing the streets all night, but as it turned out she was supping and sleeping very well with a European couple who befriended her. I rang her up next morning and could hear nothing but the gay piping of her voice but it was an enormous relief. We've since had a letter and she seems fairly happy so far, there is another young girl student teacher (she's teaching's English!). So the pair of them will be able to use each other in their leisure hours, I've given her strict instructions about never going out alone with men which I trust she'll stick to, anyway she isn't allowed out after 7p.m. apparently.*

*Her address is c/o Pine Mount School, Shillong,<sup>230</sup> and I'm sure she'd like to hear as she will be feeling a bit cut off at first. She really did need something definite to do and it will all come as grist in the old Mill of Experience, not to mention providing scope for her sketchbook and it's the most attractive place and the Khasis fascinating people. Anne is delighted too, I think she found Fiona's exuberance overshadowing her, she and I will now be able to concentrate – at least that's what I tell myself though the last few days seem to have been against it.*

*Two cinemas and two late nights, shockingly debauched we've been and I feel half dead as a result. We saw the "Nun's Story" at Sonari, which I enjoyed very much, though it was rather drawn out in the early stages and considerably more so by the Sonari projector which had to be rewound between reels, but I thought very sincere and not just mused-up Hollywood. "Three Men in a Boat" which we saw at Nazira yesterday and was very overdone, I felt I should scream if one more man fell into one more river in his underclothes,*



*anyway I loathe Jimmy Edwards quite apart from my natural loathing of huntin' men.*

*The Edyes were there, their son Anto is just starting on his first job as a schoolmaster in Uganda, he did a year's special training after Cambridge. He wanted to come east but apparently Uganda is a fairly settled spot if anywhere in Africa could be called that.*

*Daddy is very busy as you can imagine, the Season just starting and this being the Vital Year in the company's life. I should hate to give your friend the wrong advice but everyone who knows is buying our shares (Assam and African Holdings) as they seem to think we shall go up with a bang in the next couple of years – we certainly couldn't go down much further! We don't sell our tea to any particular combine, they all bid though I think Typhoo takes most of it but I'm not sure. This should be a good year with all the rain but you never know, some ghastly blight may now attack us, I should think something more predictable like Terylene would be safer but it depends how much he has to throw about.*

*I heard from Billy the other day and he says he might be able to fix you up with a job if you aren't already fixed, he likes his new school, perhaps he could get you in there. But I still feel a manual job in the open air would be more relaxing. I suppose this is the month for Balls and I hope you'll manage to afford at least one, Daddy and I went to one at Oriel College when we were there, but I only remember a very old tortoise with the college shield on its back, I think you have to be part of the place to enjoy that sort of thing (balls, not tortoises). I am on the point of writing to the Ruskin School of Art among others.*

*I've just had a letter from Fiona who seems to be having an exhausting time teaching hundreds of kiddies in the same room as hundreds of others are being taught. I hope she will stand the pace. As the ones she is teaching English talk little except Naga, Khasi, Lushai etc. it sounds rather a hopeless task altogether!*

*With much love from us all - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo 22nd May 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter about some lovely May evenings, very homesick making. I remember those Oxford evenings so well and I always wished I was young and uncluttered to enjoy them properly (i.e. by the three of you aged 5, 3, and 1!) so it's nice that you are having the chance. The trouble is that the combination of pleasant companionship and idyllic surroundings occurs so seldom in life that one is inclined to spend ones time looking nostalgically backwards*

*May here progresses on its wet way, and we keep saying "By Jove it's going to hit us when it does come" but so far so good. Not really all that good actually, as the fruit isn't ripening and the tea isn't growing, but it's such a relief not to have to lock oneself inside for hours every day. I don't mind too much for myself as I always have lots to read but it's going to be trying for Anne. So far she seems to be quite content although you can never tell with Anne really, I think she is making progress with her work, her first Eng. Lang. test was returned with "Promising Work" as a comment which was encouraging as it is her worst subject.*

*We are still with Henry VIII and the Emp. Charles, I can't see us ever finishing our syllabus, we shall probably be working day and night for the last couple of months. I have just been lent "The Thirty Years War" by C.V. Wedgewood which looks interesting and is a subject on which I know less than nothing. I shall be sorry to give all this up, of course I won't have to but without the incentive one gets lazy.*

*Not a very thrilling week, we went down to the head clerk's brother's wedding on Saturday evening, but as usual we were sat down at a table and fed cold chicken off our own plates by our own bearer, and saw nothing of the wedding. It lasts for five days anyway so there are obviously long gaps. Anne and I went in to polo on Wednesday and she played very well,*

*though I can't say I enjoyed watching her thundering around with all those rough men, however it's the highlight of her week so I couldn't possibly stop her. (Bother this typewriter, another thing to complain to Daddy about).*

*There was no film on Sunday but we went in for young Terry to play tennis, and Anne and I played at golf and had a drink with Tom Poole afterwards and got launched into the usual argument about the rights and wrongs of the Eichmann trial,<sup>231</sup> what makes for a happy life etc. (You'd think we knew by now!) And arrived home to find Daddy just locking the dogs up and feeling rather aggrieved. He hasn't been to the club for three weeks, don't blame him it's jolly boring but Anne and Terry like to get out and I go along for ballast, or rather because Anne won't to go without me.*

*We had the general manager and his wife out to drinks last week, plus a friend who had just had the bottom of his spine operated on – it was an excessively sticky evening, tossed every sort of conversational pebble into the pools of silence but they all sank like stones without leaving a ripple. The friend on his sore spine wasn't more miserably uncomfortable than I was, the G.M. is quite without conversation outside his work and she always seems to be dead tired, I even got desperate enough to get out one of my photograph albums at one stage, ah well our duty is now done.*

*We are having the Edye's out to stay for the weekend, Anto their son has just finished his teacher's training and is going to Uganda, he gets well paid but Africa isn't a very cheerful prospect. Did Steve stick it out?*

*I think Fiona must have taken the poetry book I kept when I was in love as I can't find it – but I wasn't very original I'm afraid. There was Donne "Dear love for nothing less than thee", and "Being your slave what can I do but tend" and Yeats "Had I the heavens embroidered cloths" and one called "Love is enough, though the world be waning" and one "Because we made a promise you and I" authors unknown, and a dreadful one "I do not love thee, no I do not love thee, And yet when thou art absent I am sad" which I seemed to like excessively! Oh and "Now that we two have been apart so long" which I don't think is very good poetry either but I still like. I'm sure you must have found all these. How quickly the wheel turns, it only seems the other day that I was writing them. Do you know that lovely one "Be thou at rest this night?", and "Autumn" by De La Mare which isn't strictly love but very mournful and haunting. I'll try and find my book, maybe it's lurking in some corner.*

*Daddy and Anne champing round wanting their lunch, so no more. They send their love, we all want to know what Julie looks like!*

*Much love from us all – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo 30th May 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*I don't think we've had a letter this week, but we're not worried, this is the month of revelry for you and I hope you could take part in some of it and the weather has been kind.*

*It's gone in a flash here, Anne's birthday on Saturday and we shall have been out nearly 8 months – incredible. We shan't be able to offer her much in the way of gaiety but will hope there's a good film on at Sonari in the evening, she has grown up enormously, is tall and willowy and much more self-possessed, if she could only get rid of her spots completely would be free of all her inhibitions.*

*Fiona writes quite cheerfully from Shillong, I expect you've heard from her, her only moan is the strictness of the rules about being in late, I can't say I'm sorry actually. I think she will be quite happy to stay there till October, then we shall have to see. We were talking yesterday about taking our local leave up the Bareilly river, probably over Christmas, there*

*is a delightful Forest bungalow and it would be lovely to get away from all the grisly celebrations here.*

*The girls and I will be coming home by boat in April, in time for Anne and I to run round picking buttercups and collecting rabbits' bones for our Biology, and finding someone who can talk French to her too I hope. As Daddy only gets three months leave there won't be much time except to settle down and pick ourselves up again but one thing I'm going to do is climb Coniston Old Man!*

*I was reading in the Spectator about some Diploma in Youth Work that Manchester University was offering, it means a year there after graduation but might be worthwhile, of course the kind of jobs you would get as a result would never be very highly paid but would be rewarding, and there would be scope to travel I'm sure. I haven't mentioned this to Daddy by the way, as I know he rather hankers for something plush in I.C.I. or Shell, but I'm sure the Rat Race is a deadly way of living and only leads to ulcers, and the recipe for a happy life is service to some cause you care about. You would think Daddy would have learnt the futility of Business and the deadly uncharitableness of the whole set up, he thinks it only applies to Tea but I'm sure it's universal. Perhaps you still have the church in mind, anyway it is your mind and you must make it up for yourself! We were just saying the other day how things have changed in the last generation, even in our day parents decided on their son's careers – and then were most grieved if the results were poor. That much progress has been made – and yet I suppose it's just as easy for a boy to make a mistake as his parents, and leaves him with no one to blame it on.*

*Enough of this vapid philosophizing, the trouble is there isn't a great deal of news, at this time of year it takes a conscious effort every morning to decide what day of the week it is. We should have been breaking our routine by going into polo this afternoon but it's deluging and has been since dawn, poor Anne she looks forward to it all week. The monsoon hasn't broken yet and already the Brahmaputra is above danger level, we shall have to lay in stocks of luncheon meat obviously.*

*The weekend before this broke was boiling hot, we had the Edyes to stay and spent most of the time gasping and arguing on the verandah, sometimes with them and sometimes with each other. One of the subjects we discussed was the new Bible (which none of us has read) but we have read extracts and were arguing as to whether the sacrifice of all the beauty and mystery made up for making it simpler and clearer – everyone is arguing the same thing, what do you think? I maintain that it would be criminal to replace the Authorised Version in schools with this one, thus depriving children of the most wonderful literature in the world, but I doubt if schoolchildren read any Bible without being forced. The Edyes were both in good form though fed up with the frustrations of their job like us and I think Tim is chucking in his hand on his next leave. Anto has found his year of teaching in a secondary school in Wales a heartbreaking affair as the boys are so undisciplined, but perhaps he will have more success among the Ugandans.*

*We went to the film at the club in the evening, "The March Hare", which turned out to be much better than we expected, lovely country scenes of Ireland which looked like the Lake District, and lots of delicious horses galloping around them, just the thing for a hot evening. Unfortunately Daphne Meredith was overcome by the heat and Celia and I spent some of the time in the ladies room with her helping her recover, so missed the final scene where the heroes' unknown horse wins the Derby but it was a foregone conclusion anyway.*

*A letter just arrived from you, most welcome. I'm glad you've got a job, it should be interesting and give you an idea as to whether you'd like to spend your life at it. How are the economics going to work out? Are you going to be able to manage till then, and will you be self-supporting while you're there? Your holiday schedule sounds nice, the only thing that strikes me as unnecessary perhaps is the ten days in the Lakes and then all the way back to*

*Devon before going to the Hebrides. I'm sure Billy would put you up for that time and save all that travelling, and Julie could maybe come up and stay later? I'm thinking of the expense of course, but perhaps Richard will be able to drive you to Iwerne. You must go and see the Marsdens<sup>232</sup> while you're there, I had a card from them at Christmas and have been on the point of writing ever since.*

*You seem to be at the same stage of History as us, but we had to "do" Luther in a single lesson and all Fisher says about Zwingli's character is that he is the most attractive of all the reformers – perhaps you can tell us why? I must say I would prefer to linger over a single period than hurry along a syllabus, I got the official one from London University the other day and it said it was looking for knowledge of the broad outlines of history, not technical details – this means questions like "Discuss the Social progress made between ..." or "Comment on the religious situation during ..." which is far more difficult than simply to learn the acts of the Reformation Parliament! I am trying to make Anne see History as a living performance, and when she's asked for "The problems that faced Charles V" to imagine herself in his place, with his background and upbringing, and think what her problem would be. Perhaps this is a little fanciful, but it is so much easier to remember facts that you understand.*

*I'm deep in Neale's "Queen Elisabeth" at the moment which is a model of historical writing, you must have read it, it brings every character to sparkling life, without embroidering or distorting. If you ever find you don't want to keep any of your essays on Luther or anyone, we should love to have them as you have so many more books of reference. In English I'm battling against the essay writing taught in all the books, "Introductory para, two or more intermediate paras, concluding para" which leads to such deadly and stultifying writing, surely it's much better to jump in with both feet, say what you've got to say, and stop. I think so.*

*I wish we had a colour film for the camera, the flowering trees are simply magnificent, as I sit on the Veranda writing this I'm looking out on a shower of gold, pink and scarlet, so sad that Fiona missed it. It makes up for a lot of the tiresome curse of the hot weather, flies, leeches, mosquitoes and lethargy. There seems to be trouble brewing again over the "language question" but I hope it isn't as bad as last year, it's so silly as Assamese and Bengali are so alike that it's practically impossible to tell them apart.*

*I have my book here – have you found a PUBLISHER?! Will send it off straight away.*

*Could you please fill in the bits of this form re. Time & Fees in College & send it on to L.C.C. Preston – Percy Lord, B.Sc.*

*Lots & lots of love from all – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo June 13th 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*You will be in your Prep School<sup>233</sup> by now, I didn't realise term ended so soon until I heard from Richard yesterday. I do hope it isn't too energetic, or rather that the energy is mostly physical and that the rest of the term the staff are congenial. I'm sorry you ran out of money, I was rather afraid you might be short but as you didn't mention it hoped for the best! How are things now in that line? Let us know if you are able to save anything out of your wages (what are they?!) and can cope with travelling expenses. Did the county give you anything towards them?*

*We had a nice surprise on Thursday when I looked up from the strawberry bed and saw through a mist of sweat that Fiona was standing in front of me. She had managed to cadge a lift down for a couple of days, very brave of her to drive 300 miles in that heat for such a short time but it was lovely to see her, looking blooming and full of beans. She was very*

*amusing about the children and staff, the former gorgeous, the latter rather pathetically absorbed with their degrees of darkness, the new headmistress is very dusky and consequently much despised! Fiona of course has an enormous advantage in that line and can get away with anything – except coming in late as the Bishop lives next door and rings up and tells them if he sees her, most un-Christian I call it. I can't imagine how she begins to teach them but the lessons seem to consist of chants "The people of Bengal are called Bengal-is" etc. which doesn't call for much hard work on either side.*

*Her social life is nil as she has to be in by seven, but she is much more philosophical these days, in fact is thinking of taking a course in philosophy at the local college and is reading furiously – growing up rapidly in fact. The only snag about it all is the food which is pretty grim, however she looks so well that I can't believe it's doing her a lot of harm and we're not exactly living off the fat of the land ourselves now that the vegetables are over and fish is out of season and meat too expensive to buy. The two days she was here were the hottest of the year, 94 degrees and frightfully humid, how we longed for a swimming pool.*

*On Friday we went to the Naga bazaar, I think I've described it before, it's very colourful and excessively smelly with heaps of bad dried fish steaming in the sun, John Lampett and a friend were there too and came back for a drink afterwards. The friend is just completing a four year world tour, he left England with £35 after college and has been working all over America, Australia and the east, very enterprising. he has done most of his travelling in third class carriages and until he went to bed in Nazira with a sore throat, has never had a day's illness. The trouble about that sort of travelling is that after a bit you would get mental indigestion and everything become a blur, at least I imagine so. He is now going to settle down and grow hops in Kent. I do think it's a good idea to get the wanderlust out of your system while you're young and without responsibilities, although then I suppose your judgement isn't very mature*

*On Saturday evening the girls and I went up to Sonari to see the film, this time the projector had broken down so we just stood about sweating and chatting, and didn't get home till midnight – a great mistake as Fiona had to be up at 4 and left looking exhausted, I haven't heard from her since so hope she's none the worse. I felt like death myself all Sunday, poor Anne and Daddy had to go into the dentist at 3 p.m. the very hottest time of day, Anne was convinced that every tooth was hanging by a thread but in the end had nothing done at all and they both went in again to the film while I had a poached egg on a tray in the Air Conditioned room, lovely. June is a beautiful but trying month, how I would love a few days to myself in a cool climate to rest and reorganise my work, we seem to be stumbling on in a rather undirected way at the moment without making such headway. I think one gets periods like that and then suddenly the sense of direction returns.*

*If you ever see an Everyman edition of Hakluyts voyages I would love it, Foyles seem a dotty crowd, every bill they send me is wrong and we are now having a long correspondence about a Mr G.C. Unwin who they think lives with me and who buys the same books and they ask me to please make him pay his bills which are duplicates of mine! So I've given up getting anything from them, actually have all I need now, Biology is proving a little tricky as we are told to go round picking up sycamore twigs, there are so many weird and fascinating things to study here, both plant and animal, it seems a pity we can't make use of those.*

*I have a baby owl in the spare bathroom, he insists on perching on top of the plug so I spend a lot of my time standing on top of the lavatory seat dangling bits of raw meat in front of him. He has wide, wise eyes and a habit of bending and stretching his knees and swaying backwards and forward that reminds me rather irreverently of a lot of clergymen I know in the pulpit, so I call him Sir Topaz. As soon as he can fly I shall let him go, I'm afraid of the cats at the moment.*

*Let us know your exact holiday plans and dates, I do hope it will be a lovely summer for you,  
Much love from us all – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo June 27th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Your first letter from your prep school just arrived, I gather you're viewing it with mixed feelings, anyway it's all Experience. I can't imagine anything worse than hundreds of small boys of that age, all bent on not learning anything, but I suppose there are one or two who make it all worthwhile. I'm sorry you ran out of money again, I'll send the £7 to Granny, but will you let us know exactly what the situation is, whether you are able to pay Richard back out of your wages and if you will have anything over? What are you now going to do between the end of your job and going to Iwerne? And when will that be? We'll send something at the end of July anyway, but would like to have an idea of your needs during the vac. Are you going to the Hebrides by car, train or hitch hiking? I'm sorry Julie won't be able to come after all, I gather her parents thought they were all asked, hope there was no offence taken?*

*Here we've just come to the end of a beastly hot spell with the temperature at about 95 every day and the humidity the same. It broke yesterday morning in a downpour and I'm actually not sweating at the moment. It's only six thirty in the morning admittedly, Anne now gets up at this time and does her prep, she is writing an Essay on "The Best Time of the Day" at the moment in which I foresee lots of rhapsodising about the dewy grass and the birdsong, she is at the stage now where she thinks scents should meet one's nostrils and sights encounter one's eyes, it is hard to impress the idea of extreme simplicity and harder still to be simple without being dull. I asked her the other day what she thought was the essential difference between poetry and prose and she said "It's got beat man, it's got beat" which I thought was rather succinct. I am at the state where I'm quite certain that we shan't be able to finish any of our syllabuses, the pity of it is that we can't linger over things that interest us but have to keep pressing on with that awful Target looming in the mists. We've at last abandoned Henry VIIIth and are whipping through the next two reigns as I can foresee that Elizabeth is going to take an eternity.*

*Social life is pretty static, it's too hot for one thing and the men are on the whole too tired and busy. There was a riot on one of the gardens last Saturday and the Manager only escaped by hiding in a wardrobe, armed police had to be called in and it was altogether an awful pity. The coolies were arrested and blamed but of course it's always the managers fault that things should have reached that stage. Our new General Manager is a flint hard Scot, self-made, with a lets-show-em-who's-master attitude towards the labour which I'm sure is going to lead to lots of trouble and is at the least sickening.*

*Daddy mentioned here that he hoped the trouble wouldn't spread and they assured him that they had all taken an oath in the temple that there would be no trouble while he was here which was comforting and shows what kindness can achieve. I do so hate most tea planters, I can't think how Daddy came to be mixed up with them!*

*Apart from the riot there have been no excitements, we had our film on Sunday with the Queen's tour of India first which was beautiful. As usual she managed to register nothing at all, even faced with the Taj Mahal, how different from the first Queen Elizabeth was with her happy knack of breaking through protocol and saying just the right thing, even if it was a kind lie, like telling a nervous mayor that his speech was the best she had heard. I suppose it's too much to expect another Elizabeth to be like her but it seems a pity the only time she registers pleasure is at the races.*



*The main film was "Paris Holiday" which was supposed to be hilarious but Daddy and I sat through it without a smile, perhaps we were too hot but some people seemed to enjoy it. On Saturday I went in to play bridge with Mrs Simpson (G.M's wife) I don't like morning bridge but made an exception and quite enjoyed it, Anne swam in their warm pool and it made a change for us.*

*The big day of her week is to-day when there is polo, she is getting quite good and I feel that at least she's had this pleasure that she wouldn't have got anywhere else. Babs Meredith is coming out soon for two months which will give her companionship and we are planning our local leave up the river and Daddy has just taken out his reel, the very sound of it brings back the cool and the bliss of the river.*

*My little owl Malvolio is still lording it on top of the plug and I feel I shall spend the rest of my natural standing on top of the lavatory seat holding up bits of raw meat with the sweat running into my eyes and the meat juice into my armpits. I think mother owls teach their children how to kill but simply can't face the thought of dangling dead mice between my teeth and he has obviously got the idea that food is something that comes at regular intervals from outer space. As always it's fascinating to watch an animal at close quarters and notice things about it that never occurred to you, such as the rakish way an owl winks, but upwards, the lower lid doing the moving, and the incredibly silent flight and the way its head can move round in a complete circle on its neck and its habit of holding food in one claw while nonchalantly balanced on the other and picking at it with exactly the absorbed expression of a fat man chewing an apple.*

*Copthorne sounds a lovely place, how did you hear of it? I read a letter of Richard's in the Spectator, about Billy Graham, I disagreed needless to say but it was a good effort getting it published. Have you been reading the Sunday Times articles on religion in the universities? Very interesting, I wonder how it has affected you, if at all?*

*Breakfast – with our own fresh pineapples, stewed peaches and papyrs – so we have some compensations. Hope you're not feeling too bad about Julie, is she coming to Oxford as an undergrad? Much love from us all – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo July 12th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*I've taken to answering your letters when I get one which I hope isn't leaving too big gaps, life is so absolutely timeless here in the hot weather that unless I keep strict diaries, which I don't, I find myself lost. Anyway thank you for a letter we got yesterday, reading behind the lines I fear you aren't enjoying school life much, never mind it will be nearly over by now. We liked the snap of Julie, she looks most attractive, fancy being brilliant as well! Will she be trying to get back to Oxford? Re. the money, I suggest you pay Richard back half what you owe him and we'll pay him the other half, £6. This should leave you enough until we can get some of our pay home to you which we will at the end of the month, but it won't arrive till the first or second of August. Make sure that you aren't short for your London stay, I'm sure R. won't mind waiting a bit longer but I'd rather you didn't borrow from Granny if you can help it.*

*We are right in the middle of the dreariest month here, and I'm feeling rather tired and low, combination of heat, tiredness, and lack of anything to stimulate or revive me, either in the way of climate or people or books or wireless. However as long as we all manage to keep well I shall rally. After a very hot spell we are now in for minor floods with gallons of rain thundering on the roof nightly and all the rivers roaring. I prefer it to the heat I must say but I hope the wretched people in south India aren't getting this lot on top of their previous horrors.*

*We had a little Japanese student pop out of nowhere and stay with us last week-end, can't remember if I told you. He is studying Buddhist philosophy in Nalanda university<sup>234</sup> and is spending his holiday touring, he arrived with a magnificent camera in one hand and all his belongings wrapped in a large handkerchief in the other. It was interesting hearing about Japan, Buddhism etc, he was such a gentle civilised little man that one couldn't reconcile him with the horrors of prison camps and death railways. He told us some interesting things about Japanese education, among others that schools are forbidden to teach only one religion, if they teach anything they must make sure that it includes all the great religions, an idea that might profitably be copied everywhere I feel, though you won't! His particular form of Buddhism is very close to Christianity as they acknowledge a god and have set services and of course the same ideals of love and unselfishness. We finally left him by the side of the road waiting for a bus, as immaculate and unruffled as ever.*

*Last weekend there was a Rugger match in Nazira followed by a dance – talk about mad dogs and Englishmen. About a hundred hairy men descended on the club from all over Assam and I only wished Fiona had been there, she would have been in heaven. We lost the Rugger and afterwards betook ourselves to the club where we sweated and shouted for what seemed an eternity, how I hate crowds these days and the false bonhomie induced by drink, I shall never go to the club again when the girls go home. We had the film "Anastasia" the evening before which was pretty punk but a relief from the series of dreary comedies we've been having. Strikes me this letter is more than a little jaded, the Mid Rains Mood but of course life has its compensations, wait a minute and I'll try and think of some!*

*Anne has lots of friends coming out this month to spend their hols, I expect she will hate them all but it will make her feel less isolated at the club. We are plugging on with the work, are just about to launch ourselves into the French Wars of Religion and have a guinea pig decomposing on the back verandah for our Biology. I let Sir Topaz go as he was getting so big and strong, he came back the next evening to see us but that was the last time, I hope he is managing. He was a fiercely independent character, not a bit like the other birds I've kept, when I finally caught him he dug large holes in my hand with his talons and cursed something frightful.*

*I wish you could get us a cheap edition of the "Lord of the Rings" is it in paper backs? The Cowans have been telling me about it for years but I've never read it. By the way do go and see the Marsdens when you're in Iwerne, I shall be writing to her to say you'll be along. And the Cowans on your way north, they'll be in their new house Nicola has covered herself with all sorts of glory and now won a competition giving her a fortnight in Paris, poor Felicity its hard on her but luckily she has a sense of humour.*

*Sorry for a dull catalogue of grievances, I'm never at my best at this time of the morning anyway but life isn't all that bad, not when you think of flood victims and refugees and Angola and the whole of this sub-continent practically.*

*We all send lots of love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo July 23rd 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*Your letter yesterday arrived very accurately on my birthday, and I'm sure your subconscious must have prompted it. Don't worry, I quite understand you have lots else on your mind at the moment. I do hope you made up your tiff with Julie, I'm sorry the dance wasn't as good as you'd hoped, I imagine all that high class entertaining inclined to be dreary, I don't know how the wretched girls can get through a "season" of it. The animals sounded fun though. I think you will be with Billy and Julia now, or just about,<sup>235</sup> so will*

*send this there, I hope you have a fine week end and the thought of facing the road and going to the sea is not too fearful. Give them all my love.*

*Life goes on its steamy way, I spent a very quiet birthday alone with Daddy as Anne has gone away to the Rosses who have their three out for the holidays. There was to be a dance last night which she was "dreading like death" she said for a week before, but I thought the change would do her good – me too. I spent quite a lot of the day browsing through old Listeners and cutting out articles about Oliver Cromwell and in the evening we split a beer and talked about Field Head and it was all very restful and nice. There isn't a lot one can do here in the middle of July except have some friends to dinner which is a wearing business as the cook is having dizzy spells just to add to his general dottiness.*

*We had the Lobbans to lunch on Wednesday and organised chicken in aspic and ice cream which we made the day before to be on the safe side, but they forgot to turn up the fridge and the whole thing turned into pink and beige puddles in which bits of rice and pineapple swam despondently. The Lobbans have their children out for the holidays too and we played Knock Out Whist till our eyes were starting out of our heads, mine were quite far out before they arrived as I'd had a sleepless night and by the time we finally got to bed that night at 1 a.m. (there was a club meeting) I looked and felt like a dying sheep.*

*Daddy is on the club committee and once a month they disappear into the library and come tottering out again four and a half hours later having decided to hold another meeting next month. There isn't very much conversation to keep one going at this time of year so the club is more boring than usual, though we had a suicide, a broken back and the unexpected arrival of someone's fiancée to help things along this time. That sounds callous, the suicide was very tragic actually as he was engaged to a nice girl, sister of one of our Indian wives. The fiancée belongs to a brand new assistant who got her out without the permission of the Board and they are refusing to let them get married, poor girl it's a bit hard on her having left a good job in Paris to find herself homeless and husbandless in a place like this.*

*Fiona is trying to get her a job in Shillong, she is attractive and far too good for her fiancée who is a pompous little man who says everything is farntarstic. I hope she stays as she will be a companion for Fiona, Anne and I have been lucky enough to be offered a lift up to Shillong to collect her in mid-October and hope to spend a couple of days there, in the school probably. The term doesn't officially end till December so I hope I shan't have too many fierce letters from the head mistress to contend with but I don't want her to say any longer.*

*Apart from other things we are planning our two weeks local level in November we get quite a good allowance and if we sit by the side of a river as we intend doing, eating sardines and rice and going to bed when it gets dark we hope to make a huge profit. Somehow our calculations always go astray though and we find our whole allowance going on petrol. never mind, it's nice to plan. We have found a delightful spot up a little river right on Cherideo, a small waterfall and pool in which one can swim a few strokes, the whole overhung by deliciously rustling bamboos and gay with butterflies. Daddy and I have been out there this morning and its lovely to think there is somewhere one can go when the heat becomes too oppressive.*

*I envy you the Hebrides, what I couldn't do with just one misty shieling just now! You must write us long and mouth-watering descriptions and look round for a croft we can retire to when the crowds round Field Head become too oppressive. I am getting to loathe crowds, my idea of pleasure is just two or three people I really like, books, music and hills – and a paint box within reach. I shall have all those things when I come home, occasionally I have them here but the people one really likes are so scattered and one so seldom gets them without all the other horrors hovering in the background.*

*I have now got to write a forward to a book about some Assamese gent of whom I know nothing. The author of the book assures me that he is on a par with Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth etc. He may be right, but dare I say so in my preface? It is the sort of book that nobody will read, poor author, he is a terribly earnest young man burning to discuss Byron, Keats, Spenser etc. but his English is quite beyond me and the only contribution I can make to the conversation is "Pardon?"*

*We are sending £20 at the end of the month. Let us know what you have managed to pay Richard. Please thank him for his birthday letter if you see him. Much love to Robert & A & all the Jameses, will be writing to former. Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo August 1st 1961 [It was sent to Aunt Julia at West Burton, and forwarded from there to the V.P.S. Camp at Iwerne Minster].

*My dear Alan,*

*I hope this will catch you on your royal progress and that you're enjoying it, I've lost track of the weather at home. I'll get it off my chest and tell you that it's still hot here but we feel we have turned the corner and in eight weeks' time it will all be over. We are being lent a car to go to Shillong and staying at the school when we get there so it shouldn't cost us much, we shall only stay a few days in any case. I'm looking forward to having Fiona back, and there are several new young men to amuse her through the winter, she is actually much changed in that respect, positively choosy if you can believe it! The fiancée I told you about in my last letter has gone up to Shillong to teach too which will be nice for F., we still haven't heard about our forest bungalow by the river but are keeping our fingers crossed.*

*Not much to report this week, I had a sleepless spell for three days when I went round with my eyes sunk in their sockets spitting at the servants, but on Sunday I made up for it by sleeping till 11 a.m., going for a walk, sleeping again till 5 p.m. having a bath and back to bed for the night! Luckily I managed to fit all that in because on Monday night the electricity broke down, Daddy spent a good while plunging about in deep jungle being bitten by leeches but couldn't find the short so we had to spend the night without even a fan. Luckily it was reasonably cool but even so the three of us and Candy all breathing hotly in one small room was well nigh insufferable. Anyway it made us appreciate it all the more last night.*

*On Saturday evening Anne and I went up to Sonari it see another Western "Rio Bravo" which was terribly exciting except that the sound varied from ear splitting shrieks to mouthing silence which made it hard to sort out the good men from the bad. However it improved towards the end in time for Dean Martin to sing "My rifle my pony and me" which was the best bit.*

*On Sunday in between sleeps we went up to our little waterfall and had a swim, it is about half a mile walk along a little jungle path, trudging along in single file we always feel like a mixture of Dr Livingstone and Jack Warner with the bamboos and the creepers and the hoof marks of animals (deer actually) and the hooting jungle birds and the sweat trickling down our necks. The pool is lovely, cold and quiet, there is a large green and gold lizard who is obviously in charge of it and who must resent us noisy trippers. It reminds me of the Meeting Pool, it would be fun to make a hide in a tree and stay through a night, I'm sure everyone who's anyone drops in for a drink.*

*When I'm on my own at the pool I shall spend a lot of my time up there writing my History of Assam which no one will read. Our other History seems to have come to an impasse again, we have been teetering on the edge of Elizabeth's reign for several weeks while I try to get it straight in my head and filling in time with revision and reading from your Michelet, I think I've now got it fairly sorted out, the French Wars of Religion are my pet hate but the syllabus*

*insists that it wants the "broad outlines" and not technical detail so I doubt if battles and treaties are called for, except the last one.*

*We find it very hard to work in this weather, the mornings are all right but after lunch we both collapse and its sheer hell trying to work out character sketches when all one want to do is go to bed and flake out. Anne is really very good about it, the most important thing is that she is reading at last.*

*I am to take over club Librarian soon which will mean that at least we get a chance to read new books, I shall be terribly unpopular as I intend locking the library up and sitting there with the keys, breathing fire and fines. If you hear of anything special in the way of books I can send for let me know.*

*I'm a bit worried about your finances, Daddy says he can't spare more than £15 this month which he has sent home, but this won't see you up to the Hebrides. By the time the next lot goes it will be too late. The only thing I can think of is for you to use your motor bike money and we will pay it back when we get our commission. I have no idea how much you got for your teaching and if you managed to put some by for your holiday, Granny says she put the money into Premium Bonds so you'd better ask her to get it out again quick! I'm sorry about this, I'm afraid this is how it's going to be till you leave Oxford, think how nice it's going to be for you when you start earning though.*

*Thank you very much for your nice birthday letter, I'm longing to read "The Lord of the Rings", I can't think how we managed to miss it. I'm reading "Buddenbrooks" by Thomas Mann at the moment, the first of his books I've read, a long long family story and fascinating for it's picture of a completely alien way of life. It's nice discovering a new author and thinking of all the pleasure in store.*

*Give my love to Billy & Julia and thank B. for his birthday letter which I will answer soon. Go & see the Marsdens at Iwerne. I think their farm is called Broad Lea farm. Much love from us all – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo August 9th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Your last letter came from London, and I'm glad you were seeing Julie, sad that she's going away for such a long time. You didn't mention Angela and Robert, were they there? The black sweater sounds real beat – and so practical, never needing to be washed! Fiona will have it off you before she's been in the house five minutes. You will find her a changed character though, she wrote and said she had spent last Sunday lying on the floor listening to Beethoven and described it as the perfect way to spend a day! The fiance I told you about went up to Shillong and stayed with F. for several days but apparently couldn't find a job and is back, she said Fiona had done some very good drawings, I am overcome by the talents of my family and stuff them down everyone's throats eternally. I hope you got the money in time, you certainly did very well and we are most grateful.*

*We had a fairly hectic week end (for Nazira P.O.) as we went up to Moran for the day on Sunday and quite a day it was. Daddy go us up at six to be ready to leave at 8.30, we were joining the Lobbans at the river and taking a curry lunch to be eaten by the swimming pool. We had only got half a mile from the bungalow when a sinister clanking and an ominous yellow trickle made me open the picnic basket to discovery that the curry saucepan had tipped over and the contents were oozing over everything. Of course Daddy wouldn't stop to let me reorganize so the rest of the journey was fraught with anxiety and I arrived with a crick in my neck and curry stains all over.*

*Daddy and Doug Lobban went to play golf while we took assorted kiddies to the pool, and there we stayed for the rest of the day, swimming, talking and drinking and eating a plateful*

*of yellow rice for lunch. Daddy romped madly with all the children, swam and swam, drank more than was good for him and then at five o'clock volunteered to play in a Rugger Match! Doug Lobban did the same and Margaret and I nearly swooned as the two portly gents tottered onto the field. They were both full backs and neither contributed anything to the game needless to say, but at least it has taught them a lesson, they went on the field determined to teach the young blokes what real Rugger was and never had the chance of teaching anybody anything because they never got near the ball. Daddy was heartbroken at the time but I can foresee stories beginning "The last game of Rugger I played my lad I was 44. In the tropics too. Beat that if you can".*

*We finally left the club at about eight, and discovered when we were in the middle of some rice fields that we were practically out of petrol. It looked an unlikely place to find a garage, but being Assam we were directed to a mud hut out of which poured dozens of villagers, all hilariously drunk, carrying a large bucket of petrol. Incredibly glad we were to see them, and we finally got back about ten, and since then the forty four year old full back has been aching down to his little fingers and developed a heavy cold, without too much sympathy from us I'm afraid.*

*On Monday Anne and I went in to polo and the film, a Western I had seen at Sonari the week before so a certain amount of the excitement had gone, the chief thrill of the evening was suddenly seeing Hawkshead on a documentary film, Pooleys lorry and Pooley himself and the Vicar and Mr Bratton, I was squeaking with excitement. Tell them when you see them. It was all about whether the road through the village should be widened.*

*Anne is going away for a week from Sunday to stay with the Merediths who have Babs out – it will do us both a lot of good to have a break and give me a chance to assess where we really are.*

*I have been lent a new History book, lectures on European History given at Magdalen College which is the answer to all my questions and amusing reading too. If you ever have a bean I would love C.V. Wedgewood's "William the Silent" which is in Penguins I think, he is a character who fascinates me. Fiona sent me some pastels from Shillong so I plan to spend some of my holiday trying to sketch the rice planting which is in full swing just now and incredibly beautiful but the glimmering reflections of the rice in the water which in its turn reflects the clouds is almost impossible to catch.*

*The weather isn't too bad, rain every night and a coolish morning until mid-day, as long as we can hang on for another six weeks the worst will be over. We had the company accountant from Calcutta to lunch yesterday, an extraordinary looking man, a white corpse-like face and ash blond hair made him look like someone who had just been dug up, I've never seen anything so death like poor man. He was nice though, and stood up well to a lunch of gray Irish stew followed by puce cornflour mould.*

*I hope this will find you let me know if you see the Marsdens & if I got their address right.*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo August 28th 1961 - to Field Head*

*My dear Alan,*

*Your letter from Glasgow station at midnight just arrived, I can't think of anywhere more depressing, I do hope you finally got yourself to Stornoway and weren't too stiff and rheumatically to be able to enjoy the shielings – I don't know what they are either but imagine them to be rough, craggy hills, always dripping, with bits of rock jutting out on which eagles perch. You must let me know if I'm right. I'm very sorry about the money, I said Daddy had sent it and thought you would realise that it had gone to the bank, it went at the beginning of the month, why didn't you just ask the bank you clot? I will send the next lot to Granny to pay*



*her back and she will be able to pay half Iwerne too, and you could pay the other half out of the fifteen pounds in the bank. We hate keeping you so short, especially after all your hard work, but send every penny we can. I expect you will get the doings about your next grant so let us know what it is.*

*Enough of this depressing subject, and on to another one, the state of my veins. Granny will have told you they've been all clotted, they are much better and I'm allowed up at last, but have to take things very very slowly. Not being madly energetic that doesn't worry me, but I do miss not being able to walk round the garden. The doctor said it was caused by straining, as Anne remarked "But Mummy you never do anything" which is true, but I do potter and stand around a lot. The last week in bed has been trying but thank heavens for the Air Conditioner and we've tried to carry on with work which helped pass the time.*

*Anne has gone away for another few days to stay with the Rosses, I feel companionship is more important to her at this stage than experiments in Osmosis and it will give me time to get back on my feet literally. The doctor has just been and says another week should see me through so that is comforting, and then everything nice will start happening – cooler evenings, oranges, our trip to Shillong to collect Fiona and then our fishing trip. Actually that isn't turning out very well as they say we can only have one room in the bungalow which will be pretty slummy so we shall probably only stay a week. Robert Shaw has written and asked us to join his party up the Manas but it is just the time our assistant is going on leave which is sad in a way, though I must say the thought of that journey is a bit unnerving. The Shaw boys are out for the hols and are enormously huge, naturally, I hope to be able to see them before they go back.*

*No news at all, one hot day succeeding the other while I stared at the walls of the A.C. room. I've been re-reading Salar the Salmon which makes me want to throw away all our fishing rods, I wonder if they do suffer fear and pain, I wish I could be sure. I'm taking over the Nazira Library from next week, with consequent chaos probably, but at least we shall have the kind of books I like, I've got a list yards long. I shall be terribly unpopular locking the book cases up for the first time and shall probably be voted out very rapidly as the General Manager's wife is the worst offender where taking all the new books and handing them on to her friends is concerned. They are both home at the moment so everyone is having a breathing space and fortifying themselves against the next onslaught.*

*Do tell us more about Alan Barnes,<sup>236</sup> what is he doing now and why was he expelled. Also about the rest of the gang as Fiona is always keen for scandal, she does hear occasionally but the first letter writing phase is over. She won Rs 158 for a Rs 3 bet at the Shillong races the other day, Granny will remember them, if the wrong jockey is winning and can't pull his horse up he simply flings himself off. Anyway Fiona seemed to think there was something in racing after all so she will have lost the lot by now.*

*The doctor took so long that it's time for this to go, so no more. Please thank Granny for her letter, I'm on the point of answering it. Hope she's rested a bit. "Tell me not now, it needs not saying, what tunes the enchantress plays In aftermaths of still Septembers.." or is it still?*

*Anyway, much love from us all to all of you, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo September 8th 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*No gaudy picture postcard of a shieling (Daddy says he has told us hundreds of times that these are walled in sheep pens!) but your birthday present arrived a few days ago with some pictures of country like the Hebrides – a lovely book which we shall read and read, thank you very much indeed though you shouldn't have spent all that money. I love that poem of Kathleen Raines and would like to read some more, perhaps you have the Gollanz anthology*

*and I shall be able to browse in it. I have taken over the library and locked it up firmly, already sense disapproval from the people who have been stacking their book-shelves ceiling high at our expense for years, anyway I shall only be doing it for six months and should have a good supply to hand over to my successor. The first lot of books I've ordered are on the way and I'm longing to dig in, "Tudor Tragedy" is one and "The Burnt out Case" and Alan Paton's new book of short stories.*

*We've been treated to some fiery weather just when we thought the worst was over, but to-day is wet and misty, all we need is a shieling! I'm beginning to lead a more normal life but have to go very slowly, yesterday I tottered slowly round the compound and the steps to the kitchen, and my leg throbbed and ached half the night – very irritating. I went to the club on Monday to see the film where I was regaled with more stories of people who had the same complaint and all the relapses and complications that ensues, extraordinary how disease brings out the ghouliness in us all! The film was "Bernadine", quite the corniest thing conceivable with a gang of hearty college boys trying to graduate but finding it difficult to learn "Amo, Amas amat", lots of tear-jerking little Mums in the background but Pat Boone sang nicely.*

*Collected Anne from the Rosses where she had been spending a week and we are now back to the old routine, actually to-day we're jerked out of it again as the Merediths are coming to spend the day, as Daphne's day doesn't start till eleven I don't expect them for hours yet. Babs is the last of the holiday batch except the Shaw boys but I don't suppose we shall see them. Robert wrote and asked us to join his party to the Manas, but Daddy has already given his assistant leave for that time, anyway we have our own holiday booked but they say we can only have one room in the forest bungalow which is going to be a bit slummy. Never mind we shall at least get away from tea talk which is uniformly depressing.*

*In fact the whole world picture is not at its gayest just now is it, we're always treated to crises in September when morale is lowest but I suppose we shall have to get used to living with them for ever. Terry, our bright young assistant, is fond of telling me that it was my generation that were responsible for the last war, but I get my own back by asking him what he is doing about this one! He knows the answers to practically everything, India of course is an open book to him though he doesn't speak more than three words of the language after a year, as for the tea industry, he likes nothing better than to line up as many senior managers as he can and to lecture them on what's wrong with it and them. We find it amusing most of the time but I fear he won't amuse everyone. Do you and your friends feel that you have everything at your fingertips like that?*

*Daddy has been having a bit of trouble with some of his teddy boys who were letting off steam by going round the lines at night with sticks threatening to beat everyone up, it's the usual problem of semi-education and no outlet but he had to get the police in one night when they were collecting to attack the Head Clerk. The trouble is he sympathises with them, but not their methods, more trouble is brewing over the Pooja (the big Hindu harvest festival) as the younger element wants to do away with animal sacrifice but the die hards must have their goats heads, of course we think it's a great step forward that they want to stop killing only can't take any part in the argument as it involves million year-old issues.*

*This is the next day, the Merediths visit went off quite smoothly, we sent the girls off to the Naga Bazaar in the afternoon and they bought yards and yards of beads which should knock the coffee bars cold when they go home. Anne has a Biology Test this morning, they are pretty stiff her tests, two and a half hours flat out but she has never got lower than 60% and usually is in the 70's.*

*I wonder if you could get a Nature Note Book for her (with one drawing page per one lined) which perhaps Granny could send with the next lot of mags? Don't seem obtainable in India. Let us know the doings of the Gang, if it's still going, what is Martin up to these days?*

*Poor Beryl must be worried stiff about him as he doesn't seem to make any progress towards a training. When are you going back to coll? At the beginning of October I think, I expect you'll need one or two new garments, let us know how the money goes.*

*Much love to you all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo September 18th 1961

*Dear Alan,*

*A letter at last, but of course as I suspected the other one went astray, or perhaps they didn't have any Air Mail stamps in the Hebrides and it will turn up eventually. Anyway thank you very much for your very detailed one that did arrive, we were delighted to hear of your adventures and followed your progress on the map, it sounded lovely and we are quite determined to try and find a croft there to which we can retire when the pace at Field Head becomes too frantic – if only they don't start rocket stations and testing grounds as I believe they are doing on North Uist. We sit and talk for hours about our peat fire and the smell of bannocks cooking (probably burning!) and the waves and seagulls and seals and sunsets – how delicious it sounds just at the moment. Did you see any deserted barns or habitable buildings of any kind when you were there?*

*I'm sorry Granny spilt the beans about having sent "Ring of Bright Water" to Anne, actually don't tell Granny but A. has exchanged her copy for something else so it has all worked out fine. I would like to keep an otter too if I lived there, but Daddy is Off animals and I suppose there'd be the problem of what to do with it when one went away. Anyway it's nice to dream about it all, and helps us through the dreary September days.*

*The last week has been excessively awful as Anne has been having conjunctivitis as I told Granny, and hasn't been able to do anything, not even walk out in the garden. Thank goodness her eye is much better at last, and she was allowed to go to the cinema last night – I personally thought it a bit rash but she was terribly keen to see the film "On the Beach" – a delightful little piece all about atom bombs and radioactive clouds and we were left with pictures of a deserted world with only old bits of newspapers blowing about the streets – just the thing for a hot evening. It was quite a good film but they got the reels mixed up as usual and we were never quite sure whether we were still in the submarine looking for the last signs of life in America or whooping it up in the last outpost. Anyway it was too true to be anything but horrific, especially just now, and even Gregory Peck looking absolutely wooden throughout and never expressing anything except mild interest in his doom didn't relieve it. Still Anne seemed to enjoy it and I only hope her eye is none the worse this morning, she is still asleep.*

*As you can imagine there isn't a lot of other news, we had to put off our week end guests, Robert and the two boys, in case they picked up Anne's bug. A pity, I would like to have seen them and got some first-hand news of Pim. I have spent most of the week reading aloud to Anne, partly work and partly Ngaio Marsh. She lies on the bed with her eyes closed and after half an hour I say brightly "Well wasn't that interesting about Mary Queen of Scots" and discover that she had been fast asleep for twenty five of the minutes!*

*Now that I'm club librarian I've been having some really good light reading too, just finished Graham Greene's "The Burnt Out Case" which was very good although not up to his usual standard quite, but the Catholic Fathers reminded me very much of our lot out here. Also a sort of thriller "The Seven Lean Years" by Celia Fremlin which was excellent, Granny should put it on her library list. I'm now embarking on "The Tudor Tragedy" which I fear won't go down very well with Nazira P.O. but is just the job for us. Please don't worry about William the Silent, unless you happen to see the Penguin edition any time. I'm still only half way through the Thirty Years War and shall really have to get our skates on if we are*

going to leave the Tudors, such a pity one has to have this sense of hurry hurry hurry all the time and can't just browse and explore all the avenues and speculate, a pity one has to study for exams at all in fact in the sense of learning reams of facts. I was reading an article by an educationalist the other day in which he said he hoped the day would soon come when students would be allowed to take reference books into exams, so that they wouldn't have to waste so much of their time mugging up facts and would be able to be tested on their ability to sort and interpret. Very sensible I thought.

Fiona writes cheerfully and will be back in three weeks, and then the fun starts. I'm going to make her try and take her typing seriously though so that she can get enormously highly paid jobs at the drop of a hat when she comes home, unfortunately she can get even more pay for being a waitress which she says she'd far rather do. While we're on the subject, I'm enclosing a cheque herewith which I hope will see you over till you can get hold of your grant. Did they give you the same as last time? It would appear so from my calculations, but not Daddy's so let us know. Could you pay £60 for your battels and we will pay the remaining £20, then you will have £60 to carry on with. The battels seem to have gone up considerably, is this to be a termly thing? The company are now paying quite a hefty sum towards the school fees of children up to the age of eighteen – they would, everyone else is gloating. Ah well, we shall stagger on, but I wish we didn't have to keep you short and I wish after all these years Daddy could have some relief from the continual hopeless task of dragging ends together.

Anne is awake and only slightly gummy eyed so we must press on with *Parasites*, it's just the morning for a tapeworm or two! What happened to Jummy, did he have a relapse? And is the rumour true that the Manzi Fes are leaving.

Much love to you all from all of us, my letters should be more cheerful soon! Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo September 26th 1961

My dear Alan,

You'll be back at Oxford by now, plus the bottom half of your suit I hope, I had wanted to get a coat this winter, perhaps you'll be able to out of your grant? I hope the money we sent arrived all right and didn't bounce, there seems to have been some hitch about it leaving Calcutta but it should have been there in time. Thank you for a letter we got a few days ago, full of sad news about Mr Doogan, I wonder why he should have a breakdown, he struck me as being such a well-adjusted person.

It's strange that you should find pain and misery an argument in favour of religion, I find it the biggest stumbling block to accepting a loving god, when I walk round Calcutta and see the suffering of people and animals, all undeserved, I find myself unable to accept it as the way a father would treat his children. One can only presume that he has somehow placed himself in a position when he can't help. I know one is not supposed to judge such things with a limited human brain, but what else is there to use? As for blaming the devil, that is just so ludicrous – ah well there is no time or space for more of this now.

My mind is running along these lines as we have just had Father James the Catholic priest staying with us, for the first time he was tired and depressed, after a lifetimes work they are being chivvied and chased and undermined and he wouldn't be human I suppose if he didn't feel rather hopeless and resentful. He is off to Spain on leave soon, after ten years, and is going to stay with his famous opera singer uncle, Renalto Vivaldi. How strange and different it will be, he has a beautiful voice himself and his uncle wanted to have him trained but he got the call to come to Assam and now sings in his bath, quite wonderfully, but why the gift, why the waste? Off we go again!

*Not that there is much news, the days are getting perceptibly cooler and the early mornings have a delicious tang that is most reviving, I'm busy planting peas and cauliflowers and marigolds and we can buy fish again and an occasional cabbage and altogether life is becoming a pleasure instead of something to be got through.*

*We're coming home next spring, still without any money but I can't keep the girls out any longer, Granny is very anxious for us to retire and buy the other half of the house, nothing would be nicer but we want to see you through Oxford first, we don't get a pension till Daddy is fifty so it would be a longish gap to fill with doubtful jobs. When you are through I think we shall probably risk it, if things don't improve here anyway. Anne and I are going up to Shillong next Friday to spend a week and bring Fiona back, I'm staying with the headmistress and Anne with Fiona and it will be a very cheap holiday, how blissful to smell wet pine trees. I hope we shall be able to make a pilgrimage to see the house where you were born, how happy we were there, I can still remember the wood fires and the peaceful emptiness of it, war and all. Not a very good world to be born into as you say, but when has the world been good, the more history I read the more thankful I am I wasn't there.*

*Have just read "The Tudor Tragedy" (am most amused how all the other historians are frantically jealous that it has been made a Book Society Choice and never miss an opportunity to make a sneering comment about it). Anyway I found it very interesting, the chapter on Henry VIII is the best description I've read anywhere of him, but the background to Tudor living was far from merry. How far are you now in your history? Miles ahead of us I expect. I wrote to the head of the correspondence college very crossly to complain of his model essays, said they were dull and pompous and not suitable as models and got a very nice letter back saying he was inclined to agree and would see about it. I suppose it was "the customer is always right" attitude, but it made me feel very influential! I've been reading Stendhal's "Scarlet and Black" but alas find it dull too, terrible admission, I simply can't get interested in any of the characters even though they are terribly well drawn, the first ten chapters are taken up describing how the tutor tries to pluck up courage to touch his employer's hand, he's such a horrid little worm and she is limpid as a summer stream but not nearly as lively, in fact they're both bores. But it's a classic, so obviously it's me that out of touch.*

*Yes I will send you my book but I don't think it will interest you much, it's really just a vehicle for some Indian fairy stories I translated and not in itself much of a story.<sup>237</sup> I paid £14 to get the wretched thing typed, so you won't lose it will you – not that I have any hopes of publication but I thought it might amuse my grandchildren as it's based on the lives of Fiona and Anne when they were out here before.*

*Was most amused to hear of your junketings with David Porter,<sup>238</sup> one of these days someone will accept a proposal and then you'll be sunk! I hope you aren't missing Julie too much, this should be the best year for you whatever the world situation and good years don't come all that often so make the most of it. Much love from us all – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 4th October 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*The eve of our departure for Shillong, this time to-morrow we shall have started on the eight hour drive to Gauhati, then a couple of hours up the hill and it will be cool – let's hope not too freezing though as I don't suppose a Government School will have many fires. We have written a lot of lists and had fierce arguments with Anne about what she can take and now there is nothing left to do but wash, mend, make cakes, plant out my dahlias, write several letters, order food for a week and pack. We've had a few rather sizzling days so it will*

*be specially nice to get away and by the time we get back it should be really on the turn – the weather I mean.*

*We had a fairly hectic weekend with the Rosses to spend the night on Saturday and nine due for Sunday lunch. Daddy's assistant had been writhing in pain for days and days and they suddenly decided to fly him to Calcutta in the middle of it all so Daddy was dashing round organising ambulances that never arrived as well as running the whole garden single handed.*

*Betty and Anne and I went up to Sonari on Saturday evening to see "Cone of Silence" a rather good film about aeroplanes but they had put it through the wrong lense and everyone was drawn out as if they had been put through a mangle, it was very funny to see long thin figures climbing out of little fat squashed up cars but surprising how quickly one got used to it and it was quite exciting.*

*On Monday we had our film, "Peyton Place" a long long slightly mauve film about New England, but it cheered up when the pale mauve girl murdered her dark puce stepfather, all very drivellish really but most people seemed to enjoy it. It was Gandhi's birthday and no drinks were served so the club emptied in about five minutes after the film.*

*Our Sunday lunch party started at mid-day and the guests left at half past eight, I thought they were never going and my whole face ached with suppressed yawns as I hadn't slept the night before. Anyway thats one thing I shall do in Shillong, sleep, the height affects me like a drug to begin with and I can't keep awake. Thats about all that has happened this week, work has been going fairly well though I never seem to be able to keep remotely up to my carefully worked out schedule, I hope our break will freshen us both up.*

*We heard from Granpa that you had got off to Oxford safely, you'll be well and truly dug in by now, you must try and get in some games this term as there won't be so many distractions perhaps. The Buckmasters weren't back when he wrote but they'll have to do something about rescuing Granny from the dachshunds, poor Jummy, life can't be any fun for him now and it's amazing really that he is carrying on at all. Your descriptions of the autumn trees and skies made me feel quite ill at the thought of all we are missing, there'll be lots of other autumns of course but I shall be forty five before I see my next, I think I miss it more than anything else. We have some new terms coming out, everyone is to get leave every twenty one month's so it will mean that one has to take it when-ever it falls, winter or summer, it doesn't really affect us much but people like the Rosses are naturally delighted. We are also supposed to be getting a raise in pay but are sceptical, they will probably give us just enough to put us into a higher tax bracket, it's what usually happens!*

*Never mind, I refuse to let myself be bogged down this morning, it's a beautiful day although it's going to get very hot later and my veins haven't clotted as I was afraid they might nor has Anne's eye burst out again so we haven't much to complain about.*

*I'll write in a few days from Shillong, with my back against a pine tree & a breeze on my cheek.*

*Much love from us all,  
Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo October 17th 1961*

*My dear Alan,*

*Alas I never got off your letter in Shillong, I bought an Airgraph but then went all mean about buying a pen and ink, sorry! Two letters for me on my return, with the wonderful news of your grant, needless to say we were thrilled, it'll make all the difference. I'm sure you should take the credit, it's probably due to your tutor's report, anyway I hope it'll ease things for you, you'll be able to feel you can buy the odd clothes and records without carrying loads*



*of guilt round afterwards. Granny wrote the same day with news of a large win, and we heard our pay was to be increased (haven't heard by how much yet) so altogether felt hilarious. Money doesn't matter of course, but how blissfully happy one feels to have some nevertheless.*

*We thoroughly enjoyed our week in Shillong, the complete change of climate, setting and companions was just what I needed, forgot all my little feuds and frustrations and came back mightily refreshed and at least half a stone heavier. We were driven up by a young planter who is engaged to a Khasi girl, a great friend of Fiona's, a rather lovely creature but one wonders about these mixed marriages. He was staying at her house, and deposited us at the school, it was pouring with rain and my first sight of Fiona shook me rigid, twice the size with masses of hair and charcoaled eyes! After the first reserve wore off we fought like those awful families on Telly about her hair, eyes and smoking, in fact still are, I think Daddy and I are winning, or rather we are reaching a compromise, five cigarettes a day, charcoal only at night and a bit off the sides of her hair!*

*She was full of beans and had the whole of Shillong at her feet, every oddity who passed on the road greeted her as a long lost friend and the policeman on duty nearly fell off his pedestal every time she passed in her orange jeans. The school was rather an arid looking institution, cement floors and bare light bulbs and everything needing paint and plaster, but the children all friendly and beautiful and the headmistress with whom I stayed a charming vague person who wandered round with her hair in rollers (she is a Madrassi, very dark and very good-looking) and appeared to have little control but couldn't have been kinder. They had their prize giving while we were there and just as the Prime Minister's wife got up to give a little speech the microphone burst forth with Pat Boone singing "Dear John" and drowning every other sound in the hall, nobody seemed to mind and only we were convulsed in giggles.*

*We spent our time eating, sleeping and wandering round the shops, and managed to fit in four cinemas! I would have liked to lie under a pine tree but Anne was craving for a bit of town life, also the weather wasn't too good and it started to rain every afternoon at one and kept on more or less solidly for the rest of the day. Shillong is being spoilt by buildings, all hideous and unplanned which are rising from every empty space, but there are still grassy slopes and pines and wonderful orchids and a fascinating population, we went everywhere in buses, quite an experience and in fact the first time I've travelled in an Indian bus. They were always overcrowded and hurtled terrifyingly down steep hills and ground painfully up them, don't know which frightened me most, the police had a rule that there was to be no standing so everyone sat on top of everyone else or squatted on their haunches along the aisle. Fiona assured me that it was just as dangerous as it seemed and they were always overturning on the steepest corners!*

*The journey back seemed very long, started at seven and got here at quarter to six that evening after a couple of breaks for coffee and sandwiches, there were five of us and luggage in a Fiat so it was a bit cramped but lovely to be home with space and springy mattresses, and of course Daddy. We spent Sunday unpacking, washing and wandering round generally, and in the evening went up to see Terry who came back from Ceylon with a guitar costing Rs 350 and doesn't even know how to start tuning it – any tips for beginners? He got quite a lot of new records and lots of Good Books, Kafka, Doestoffsky (?) and James Joyce among them so I shall be able to fill in the many gaps in my education.*

*We started school again yesterday but I feel utterly out of touch, must try and shake my mind into some sort of order again as my fuzziness communicates itself to Anne in no time. I've been telling myself that when it gets cooler it'll be easier but of course it's also more distracting as there are so many million things to be done in the garden.*

*Its Durga Pooja at the moment, the big Hindu festival and a holiday, no servants, everyone drunk but I like it as its the official end of the hot weather. Fiona has bagged the typewriter, she is full of enthusiasm but I fear it won't last. She says she is going to write, she feels on the shelf as her schoolfriend Scatty is getting married in June! Must tell you about her Shillong admirer in my next!*

*Much love from us all,  
Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo October 27th 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*A letter to thank you for, and also "Peter Abelard", for which many thanks, which arrived at the beginning of the week and which I've been trying to make last by only reading two chapters at a time, but last night I simply had to finish it. Like you I adored it, it is exactly the sort of book I like best, the only thing is that I come out of it in a daze and feel discontented and let down that life is not like that nor is anyone as fascinating and lovable, it seems to recreate a life that one knew once, somewhere, perhaps only in dreams or imagination. I agree that the mystique of Catholicism is very persuasive (I never quite know what mystique means but it feels like the right word) it appeals to both intellect and emotion, at least it does once you have accepted the fundamental truths – which in my lucid moments I cant. I wonder what Granny would feel if you became a Catholic, she is all for introducing the inquisition in reverse! Me, I'd be more likely to turn Buddhist or even Hindu which I suppose would shock you equally – when will we learn tolerance, the whole of history is a miserable drama showing the lack of it.*

*We had the Durga Pooja here last week, the big festival of the year, sort of harvest festival cum primitive mother-earth propitiation ceremony. We went down one evening and walked round the lighted stalls and paid our respects to the image, a ten armed goddess treading on the neck of her husband who is unconcernedly killing a lion. Ridiculous? Wicked? Symbolic? But the expression of the coolies as they kneel in front of her and hold out their hands for a bit of sacred coconut is just exactly the same as you see on faces as they are offered communion. Anyway right or wrong I always enjoy the pooja, the smells of frying spices and incense and burning torches and burning rubber and the happiness of the coolies seems exciting, in spite of the foot of mud one has to plod through as it always coincides with the last burst of rain.*

*We watched a film for a bit, all about a man who is half bear and has an operation which restores his manly beauty but makes him twice as ferocious, the bit where he was coming round from the anaesthetic, all melting eyes and smiling mouth was rather terrifying as he suddenly snarls and leaps at the doctor and nurse who stand riveted to the spot and allow themselves to be batted over the head with scalpels – luckily the heroine happens to be passing and has a song ready to sing which soothes him long enough for them to tidy up the mess. Each film lasted three hours and the show broke up at six in the morning. Daddy was a bit on edge for the three days the pooja lasted as there was trouble brewing between the old and young elements but it all passed off peacefully.*

*We've had a quiet week altogether, the girls were away for the week-end and came back on Monday morning having had four hours sleep in two nights so they spent most of that day in bed while I hissed at the servants and dogs. We went into the club in the evening, I have to go to do the library which is a bore, Fiona was overcome at the thought of meeting everyone again after six months particularly in her present bulbous condition, everyone was very polite but she has spent the last few days going for long walks and coming back to bits of dry toast and looks thinner and better already.*

*We are off to spend the week end with the Merediths to see the play "Ring Around the Moon" which their club is doing, I have a nasty feeling we shall be the only audience as Nazira is having a "do" of its own and we have already had to face nasty remarks about not supporting our own district!*

*It's still warm but not too, and we're revelling in the pleasures of sitting outside after lunch, gardening, badminton and talk of river trips – I hope we shall be able to make our first expedition next week-end if Daddy can get away, his assistant is still in Calcutta having an operation and will be several more weeks convalescing. It has knocked our own local leave on the head but can't be helped, I don't really want to go away at this time of year, as long as I can be left alone with my pottering routine; I would like to live like a cat, curl up in the same patch of sunlight every morning then walk barefoot through the dew to sniff the fir trees, then back for breakfast and a snooze on a green cushion before settling on the sundial to wait for lunch.*

*I must say your descriptions of cosy evenings with buttered toast and music made us very envious too, it is so seldom one is happy and knows it. Have you read Robert's new book on the H. of Commons?<sup>239</sup> I would like to get it, perhaps Granny will send it to me for Christmas, she usually buys up most of the first printing! Have you any particular wants? We can't get the feel of Christmas here but I suppose will pretend with the help of a bottle of something, how crude that sounds but Christmas in Assam is crude I fear.*

*Fiona says she is going to write, she is busy catching up on her correspondence of the last six months now that she doesn't have to pay for her own stamps. Your birthday letter to Daddy will probably arrive to-day and he'll be delighted, being a Tuesday there isn't much we can do to celebrate but we shall talk about our croft in the Hebrides.*

*With much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 9th November 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm very sorry I didn't write last week but I spent it in bed with flu and such a blinding headache I couldn't open my eyes, I staggered up for the week end as we had Robert Shaw to stay, and for the last few days have been trying to carry on still feeling as if I had half a ton of cement behind my eyes – but now at last I feel a little better. Still not quite myself but Daddy has been giving me infra-red treatment on my forehead which is beautifully soothing, the maddening thing is to be feeling ill when there is so much to be done and enjoyed outside, actually it's been wet and miserable for the last few days and we've been huddled over the fire, rather nice in a way but the usual moans all roundabout "I thought it never rained in the cold weather", and how am I supposed to get tanned?*

*Daddy and Robert and the girls went up the river on Sunday while I hurried back to bed, Daddy caught a small fish and lost a big one and they all enjoyed it enormously. We have planned to go up the Manas after all on our local leave, the Edyes have taken the bungalow over Christmas and we're going with them which will also serve the purpose of getting us out of all the grisly celebrations here.*

*Did I tell you about the play we went to at Seleng? I can't remember doing so but it was the week end before last which seems an awful long time not to have written. We spent the night with the Merediths and the play was Anouilh's "Ring Round the Moon" – unfortunately the audience was somewhat sparse as there was a counter attraction at Nazira that night, but we laughed and clapped madly and it was really quite good, not a happy choice of play though.<sup>240</sup> I've never seen anything of Anouilh's before but this seemed singularly pointless, perhaps first class acting would have made the difference, at least there were no horrid creaking pauses though. Afterwards there was a dance and we got home at 4 a.m. me with*

*my flu bugs already stirring themselves so Sunday was a somewhat dismal day of head clapping and loud sniffs. At the dance we met a new assistant with a Sedbergh tie, Roger Mayo<sup>241</sup> by name of Powell house, a great streak of about six foot 2" who is a year senior to you and remembers you vaguely. He is now a good Rugger player though says he wasn't then and represented Assam when they went down to Ceylon, he turned up here on Thursday, ostensibly to see our young assistant Terry though I think Fiona's presence had something to do with it! They invited themselves to supper and brought a gramophone and lay on the carpet playing chess and eating fish and chips, a homely evening which reminded me of England and a nice change from the boozy sort of entertaining one usually does out here.*

*Fiona is slowly adjusting herself to this life again, she has changed a lot and is worrying me on and off, not her bright and friendly self any more, at least not in public, but I suppose it's just a phase and there isn't much one can do except wait for it to pass. I shall be glad to get her home with something definite to do, this is an unnatural existence in some ways especially the lack of companionship.*

*I had to retire to bed again for the morning and now its lunch time and this must go, sorry but I hope I shall have quite got over my troubles next time I write. I worry most about Anne's work but that only makes my head ache harder and she catches up on her History notes and it's probably good for her to do more on her own. We've come to the end of Elizabeth at last and are about to embark on the Stuarts which should be more familiar ground as it came into our syllabus but that was a hundred years ago.*

*I'm glad your grant arrived at last, do you think you could pay all your battels out of it this time, and we will pay the next two lots, we are getting a raise in pay from January which should bring in another couple of hundred pounds a year if the tax people don't get hold of it. Have noted your remarks about Christmas, please don't think of sending anything to us, we can leave our present paying till we meet. Fiona has written which I hope will make up for this feeble effort, With all our love & thoughts, Mummy*



Fiona, Anne, Iris, Alice Darby and another at Nazira club, drinks by the river

Iris to Alan, Cherideo Saturday 18th November 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*You will be glad to hear that I shan't be spending this letter moaning about my head or veins as both are quite better. I thought I was never going to throw off my flu, but simply sat in the sun and refused to be lured out to the club or anywhere else and it has quite gone. My leg doesn't bother me at all either so please don't waste any sympathy on that either (curious that expression, as if sympathy was something that had to be carefully measured and made to go round).*

*As a result of this coddling of myself there is no news as my mornings have been spent teaching and my afternoons retiring to the summer house with "The Thirty Years War" (yes still) and lying in a deck chair trying to keep my mind on Wallenstein and off the birds and butterflies. Anne writes notes or essays after lunch, and then we do some poetry or Twelfth Night while we drink tea, we are doing some quite pleasant poetry, Yeats, Walter de la Mare, Rupert Brooke, Manley Hopkins etc but I find it rather difficult to "teach" it, particularly to someone who hasn't much natural interest.*

*This morning we are supposed to be packing up to spend a week end up the river but alas it has rained fairly solidly for the last twenty four hours and looks like going on and as our camping arrangements consist of a rather gimcrack piece of tarpaulin tied to the car we are doubtful about how much we would enjoy it. We never have rain at this time of year and are naturally blaming Mr. K.<sup>242</sup> and it might be tragic if it doesn't stop soon as the rice is just ready to be cut but this will rot it. If we did but know it it's probably radioactive rain to boot, anyway it has rather spoilt our week end plan and will certainly ruin the fishing. Sad because next week end is the "Spree" and then Fiona is going away, but have our fortnight up the Manas to look forward to.*

*In the usual vague Nazira P.O-ish fashion nothing much has been done about the celebrations next week end but John Lampett wandered out a couple of days ago and asked us if we would do the decorations "sort of Chinese" to go with the supper. This has resulted in feverish activity on Fiona's behalf and mandarins and dear little bridges are being turned out at the rate of knots, we wanted to make the club into an opium den with real opium and joss sticks and sinister crouching figures but this has not gone down well. In fact most of our ideas are met with a gloomy "you'll never do it in the time" from Daddy but he always ends by being madly practical and fixing all the tiresome electric wires for the moons that are to be shining through the bamboos.*

*I loathe the actual sprees themselves, the worst sort of dreary Somerset Maughamish affairs with everyone pretending to be hectically gay behind a glassy boredom – but I enjoy the preparations and it is giving Fiona an outlet, poor dear she must be so bored most of the time though she says she isn't. Her typing is progressing slowly but somehow I can't see her as a secretary except to a boss with a sense of humour who likes to write letters like "We are sorry we jave jad to roise our prices". I can't remember saying she wanted to write, actually she has no leanings in that direction, you seem to have inherited the nag. At your age I knew I could do it if only I had the time, now I realise that what I had was a tiny little talent not the world shaking genius I thought. Now also I have no ambition at all, if I wrote it would be purely for money – which brings me to the confession that I still haven't sent off my book. I will do so I promise, so that you will get it when you get back to Oxford, if not sooner. The thing is, it's too long and very boring, not at all what you expect I'm sure. I've just finished "The Disenchanted", a very amusing (and sad) story, supposed to be based on the life of Scott Fitzgerald, it's in Penguins. There are so many books I want to order for the library but sex and crime are the order of the day among planters, I never bother to get any of them out as Terry's father sends him all the proof copies from Michael Joseph.*



*Anne's only reading these days is recipes, she is suddenly swept off her feet by cookery and disappears into the kitchen every spare moment and appears three hours later with flour in her ears and some tiny little buns. Actually I'm very glad she has got a definite interest as I simply couldn't visualise her future at all but now it's too simple, a Cordon Bleu in cookery followed by fabulous jobs with South American millionaires one of whom will marry her and toss a ranch at each of her relations.*

*Have you any serious thoughts on careers? A silly question as you obviously think and talk of it all the time, I read the letters in the Sunday Times from undergrads and was amused that they were all scornful about Good Jobs, ironical when their parents have sent them to university with that one end in view – but I think they're right (the undergrads).*

*We have decided to call off our camping but take our picnic supper and try to enjoy ashy baked beans eaten round a damp hissing fire. This time next week we shall be frantically pinning up the mandarins and I shall be reminded of Mrs Knappett's dining room,<sup>243</sup> what years ago it seems. Much love from all of us, Mummy*



Iris and dogs at Cherideo

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 29th November 1961

*My Dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is overdue by three days, I thought I'd wait over the week end so that I could tell you about our exciting Spree, and when I went in to collect an airgraph form at the Nazira P.O. on Monday they hadn't any in stock or any stamps or any change or in fact anything except a row of depressed figures picking their teeth – typical of all the P.O.s out here but I thought I might be lucky! So now it's Wednesday and I've almost forgotten the*



*Spree, it wasn't very exciting anyway but we did well out of it as Fiona won a beautiful tennis racket, and Anne got a little silver cup for being the most promising polo player, and I was given a bottle of scent for no reason at all, the pot hunting Macfarlanes in fully cry!*

*Fiona was actually runner up in the tennis and should have got a pale green Thermos but I had spent several days previously telling everyone how much we needed a new racket and the winner felt bound to give it to her – the General Managers wife, who had been given a super partner and she herself is very good, so Fiona and the young man with her did very well and the last set went up to 15-13. The most fun was decorating the club the day before, our Chinese decor looked quite effective, particularly with most of the lights out at night, the piece de resistance was a huge white willow pattern pinned to the black curtains in front of the cinema screen, Fiona had cut it out in literally hundreds of pieces and it was a ghastly business getting it up but quite dazzling when lighted with spotlights and framed in bamboos. The bamboos were my contribution, they looked lovely when first arranged in huge shining clusters, but within a few hours they were drooping masses of brown leaves, however we hung Chinese lanterns among them and turned the lights still lower and it wasn't too bad. The rest of the walls were done in black silhouettes and all empty spaces filled with masks and fans and coloured kites were flying from the ceiling, no opium alas but the Chinese dinner arrived safely and was jolly delicious.*

*We finally got home at 4 a.m. somewhat whacked, at least I was though the girls who had been playing violent games and dancing for about eighteen hours were fresh as daisies. Anne scored a goal at polo, needless to say I didn't see her, nor Fiona's tennis as I was helping with the lunch and tea which simply meant arranging cruets and lettuce leaves and generally getting in the way. Thank heavens its over anyway, this forced jollity always depresses me, we went in on Sunday to finish the lunch and some people were still propping up the bar!*

*I had hoped to have Vinobe Bhave,<sup>244</sup> (the saintly gent who has been walking all over India for years getting land to give to the poor), to tea that day but he didn't come which was disappointing as I would have liked to talk to him. Perhaps it was just as well as he apparently travels round with a retinue of fifty disciples, the poor villagers he is trying to help have to feed the lot of them, at a cost of about Rs 300 a day, so one wonders if they really appreciate his efforts. In fact it's hard to decide whether he is saint, fraud or political pawn, but whatever he is he's incredibly tough as he's about seventy and has walked thousands of miles, millions of miles in fact since he started. I must say I feel very attracted to the idea of setting out with a stick in your hand no worries about where the next meal is coming from and the comfortable feeling that you are doing good too, I wouldn't mind being one of his handmaidens a bit (he has a lot of these which also makes one wonder).*

*All this and I've forgotten to thank you for the William Saroyan which arrived last week, Fiona snatched it first and loved it and now I'm reading it and find it enchanting, just the sort of book I would like to write, why can't I? Thank you very much for sending it (I was horrified to find out how much it cost to post) any paper backs you don't want are always welcome but please don't send them Air Mail. Anne and I are at last into the Thirty Years War and she is actually enjoying it, have been dreading it but by careful selection of the interesting passages it is coming to life.*

*I suppose your term is almost over now, I wonder if you'll find something to do in the vac. or have enough to occupy you with reading. I think you'll have to get yourself a dinner jacket this winter, out of the old grant. I'm afraid, I'll have to write endless letters for Christmas as I'm too late with cards as usual. We are going to do without presents this year, at least that's what we are all telling each other now but I know at the last moment there will be a panicky change of mind. We shall be leaving on December 17th, spending one night rhino watching at Kaziranga on the way, and returning on 27th. I'm so looking forward to it and dreading that some disease or other will interfere.*

*Feel a bit guilty about work but I will take our poetry book with us and hope that the change will refresh us and put new life into the Functions of the Kidneys and Concessive Clauses. Where are you now in European History? Hope your courtly and cosy love life is going along well, perhaps the Christmas dances will throw up something more positive?! Let us know all the scandal and who likes who, that is if you aren't too out of touch by now. Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, [undated but was probably a week later, in early December 1961]

*My dear Alan,*

*No letter from you this week, I imagine because you are breaking up or coming down or whatever the expression is. Anyway I hope its successfully accomplished and you are back in your little room at Field Head with all the windows tight shut and the electric fire on which is how I always remember you.*

*Here I'm sitting on the verandah before breakfast and looking out on a glittering world of cobwebs and dew, with doves cooing and wood smoke in my nostrils, the best time of the day although at this time of year it's hard to choose. It's been a quiet week as Fiona went away on Friday to stay with a girlfriend, moaning madly as she wanted to go up to Shillong and comfort another friend who had just been "let down". A sad case, the girl was Anglo-Khasi and the young man had loaded her with rings and sworn he would never be dissuaded, but his mother only had to step off the plane and he capsized. I hope I shall never try to interfere with my children and will accept with a good grace whatever they have to offer in the way of wives or husbands of whatever creed or colour. This particular girl was intelligent sweet and beautiful which is as much as anyone could reasonably expect and the fact that she was a lovely shade of golden brown needn't have made any difference as far as we could see.*

*We had the Edyes for the week end, ostensibly to discuss our Manas trip but in fact we talked about everything else. We went up the river on Sunday and Daddy and Celia fished and caught several small ones, at one stage Daddy said he was getting a bite at every cast and was having to shake them off out of embarrassment as Celia was drawing blank but she did get two in the end. We sat on the bank and ate oranges and argued sleepily and went back to smoky cups of tea and slices of plum cake and felt as relaxed and refreshed as always after a river day. Alas my pleasure in the actual fishing has gone, when I see a fish on the end of a hook I feel only its pain and fear, so silly really.*

*Our Manas trip is fairly well organized, we are spending one night at Kaziranga and one at Gauhati and only a week actually by the river. I wish you could be with us, I shall always remember when you went off on your own on the elephant and I thought you hadn't got anything and then saw the huge monsters dangling by your legs. It will be lovely just to get away from Nazira which is getting us all down, everyone is so miserable and fed up and the club is a morgue.*

*This letter isn't a birthday one, but I shall be writing again for that in a couple of days. I hope it arrives in time you know we shall be thinking of you, it is the day we arrive at the Manas so we shall toast you by the light of the hurricane lantern with the wind from the gorge roaring past the bungalow and perhaps a tiger or two. I wonder if you would get a Christmas present for Granny and Granpa out of the enclosed, I thought a Gardeners Diary or Gift Token for Granpa and perhaps another Pyrex dish for Granny to match the one we gave her for her birthday, unless you know she wants something else specially. I'm afraid you're going to find yourself rather stuck without your motor bike but perhaps Martin will lend you his if he's still there. I wonder how he did in his exam. I must write to the Buckmasters, and will be writing to Granny to-morrow tell her. Fiona comes back to-day so*

*the lull is over, the people she has been staying with are very rich and gay so I hope she won't find life too squalid here*

*Sorry for a short letter but another will follow in a day or two,  
Much love*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 11th December 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*What with the festive season and all I'm not sure when to send this, but whenever it arrives it is a Birthday Letter and brings all our love and thoughts. I don't suppose you will do anything wildly exciting this year, but I know Granny will rattle up a super spread for you and perhaps you will climb a hill and think solemn thoughts about time and its passing. It seems quite unreal to me that you are twenty and I'm filled with thoughts too, nostalgic and sentimental ones mostly in which first teeth and pattering footsteps figure prominently. Sad thoughts some of them though, about how little we've really seen of you during your growing up, I've often wondered whether the advantages of a good education really make the long banishment of one's children worthwhile. What do you think? Perhaps though parents are not the best people to bring up their offspring, being too involved with them, childhood is a pretty dreadful time whatever you do with it, one never suffers in the same way again, if that's any comfort! We shall be arriving at the Manas on the 20th, I wish you could fly out and spend that fortnight with us. We had a letter from Robert Shaw who has just been there, he caught a 31 ½ lber which is almost a record, he was almost caught himself by an elephant, a lone tusker got within 15ft of the jeep before they could get up enough speed to get away. He also watched a tiger stalking some buffalo which would be wonderful to see. I hope the girls aren't going to be bored as we shall only be able to use one rod at a time, the charges have gone up so.*

*There doesn't seem much news since I wrote a few days ago, the girls went off to Jorhat on Sunday to a cricket match and arrived back at 2 a.m. so it was obviously good cricket. It was the first time Anne has been away on her own for such a stretch and enjoyed it, she also made a conquest I gather, much to Fiona's fury! We had a lunch party here which was as boring as all such entertainments out here, just sitting about drinking and moaning and eating lunch at three with a splitting headache. How I hate planters sometimes! Anyway it Got Off various people we had been feeling guilty about for some time but we kept thinking of the river and wondering why we weren't there.*

*Yesterday was club day and we saw a fearful film, "The Seven Cities of Gold" in which wild and undiscovered Mexican Indians spoke, by some coincidence, the same language as the people who were discovering them, Michael Rennie and Co. So silly it was quite amusing. Now we have got to get down to lists and Christmas Cards (which have just arrived, too late to send home except at vast expense so hardly anyone will get one I'm afraid). I sometimes find it almost more than I can cope with, trying to carry on teaching with so many million things to do and decide in the background, it isn't the actual teaching but the thinking about it and the nagging guilty feeling that I'm letting things slide and the constant interruptions from Daddy, Fiona, servants etc. which drive me round the bend. My idea of bliss at the moment would be a week completely on my own, not a very Christmassy thought I'm afraid but it seems ages that I've even had an hour or two to myself. One of those retreats you used to go to is the answer when one begins to feel like this, perhaps I could manage one next year. Anyway this is not what a birthday letter should be at all.*

*I've just heard from Pat Cowan, I'm glad you are going to see them, it should be fun comparing notes with Nicola who is apparently enjoying Cambridge so much that she has to go to bed for several days at intervals to recover. I feel rather sad about Fiona when I read*

*what other people's teen age daughters are doing, Jill Sutcliffe's is at a school in Switzerland learning masses of useful languages and skiing and F. seems to be spending such an aimless existence here in a way. She just won't learn to type, but perhaps she is soaking up atmosphere which will come in useful one day.*

*I will be writing again for Christmas, just before we leave, Daddy sends lots of birthday wishes of course, I'm afraid our present was a small one perforce but you know what we would like to give you. Have a happy day and think of us crossing the Brahmaputra and bumping down that long dusty road to the Manas, and we'll think of you all cosy and coddled.*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 28th December 1961

*My dear Alan,*

*Well we are back, sunburnt and rested and delighted to get two letters from you to greet us – your long Christmas letter was especially nice and made me feel ashamed of the feeble birthday effort I sent you. I was tired and taut, but a fortnight without lessons or servants has put me right and I hope this serene feeling won't disappear the minute I put my foot into Nazira club as it usually does! We loved your cards, and needless to say have been thinking of you all the time we've been away – most of Christmas day was spent saying "He'll just be getting up" or listening to the Queen or whatever. I'm glad Robert and Angela got over and hope you enjoyed your stay with them, and saw some younger faces – though I dare say it's quite restful to be with older people after Oxford. I'm sorry to hear about Jummy, is he in pain or is it just weakness? I really must drop Beryl a line, it's hard to believe that Martin could be so selfish and unhelpful.*

*I don't really know where to start, we meant to keep a Journal of our trip but were too lazy, couldn't even be bothered to read though I solemnly took "The Defeat of the Spanish Armada" out every day in the boat. We spent the first week end with the Edyes helping them pack up and going over to play with a baby otter that the Merediths have. As you can imagine from Gavin Maxwell it is a ravishing creature, only about eighteen inches long at the moment and playful as a puppy, we took it to the swimming pool and after splashing for a bit came and rubbed itself dry all over us and then lay on its back sucking its toes. I took some colour snaps and we all slobbered and swooned and tried to persuade Daddy to let us take it as Daphne doesn't want to keep it, being madly house-proud and finding otter and white chair covers hard to reconcile. Daddy hasn't given in yet and Daphne has written to Maxwell, and we also hear that Gerald Durrell is coming out to stay this cold weather, but if everything else falls through we might win. With our tanks to swim and catch fish in I can't believe he would be much trouble, but of course there is the fact that I'm coming home.*

*We left in convoy on Monday afternoon and got to Kaziranga just as it was getting dark. The Merediths were there with a relation who is staying with them (Mrs Wot We Want) and the evenings was less sticky than that time you came, do you remember? We went to a new part of the game reserve and as it was a beautiful fresh morning after rain the mountains and water and deer glistened, and even the rhino looked as if they'd had a rub up. We saw masses of deer, pig, buffalo, and six rhino and I enjoyed it much more than any previous visit, it was Daddy's first so he was lucky.*



Fiona with the baby otter

*After tea and biscuits we set off on the road to Gauhati, and all went well until we arrived, when just as we were rounding the policeman in the main square there was a grinding clatter and the car stopped with a horrible finality that made Daddy shout fearful oaths and in between tell us grimly that the gears were stripped and That was That as far as getting to the Manas. By a wonderful coincidence we were fifty yards from a garage so while Anne and I got out and sat on the roundabout in case the Edyes came back to look for us, poor old Humbert Humbert<sup>245</sup> was ignominiously pushed and pulled along the road and squatted on by crowds of garage hands who took their face out of the bonnet only to give some gruesome diagnosis. We sat for an hour before the verdict was that the clutch plate had gone and that it would take at least a day to mend if they could get another, if not they would have to send to Calcutta! You can imagine our feelings as we sat in the dak bungalow that evening, tired, dirty and with the prospect of spending Christmas in quite the most revolting surroundings I've ever encountered.*

*I can't tell you what a sordid place it was, everything you touched inches deep in dirt, whining clouds of mosquitoes, beds like tables with coal black cloth mattresses on them and flies rising in swarms from the open drains to settle on your food (I call it that for want of a better word). Anyway we decided that the Edyes and Fiona should carry on to the river the next morning, and the rest of us follow as soon as we could.*

*We spent quite a pleasant day in Gauhati as it happened because we found ourselves next door to the Museum and the Public Library, so were able to potter round the old Ahom shards (quite a lot of them lying outside on the ground smothered in weeds!) and the Library was really wonderful with every sort of book, I was deep in an enormous volume called "The Reformation" when it started to get dark and Anne dragged me home.*

*The rest of the evening was horrible as the flies and dirt had done their work and she and I felt terribly sick and were writhing with tummy aches and could do nothing but lie on the coal black beds and wait for news of the clutch plate. By a miracle they managed to find one and we were able to get off next morning, infinitely relieved to leave but saddened and sickened to think of the people and animals we had seen – I chased one man half way down the bazaar for beating a dog half to death and took the sound of its screams with me and have them still.*

*From that to the peace and beauty of the Manas, more beautiful even than I remembered it. The bungalow has been poshed up, with running water and gay curtains but unfortunately they've let trees grow up in front which partly hides the view – however it is still lovely and we had tea on the bench outside, watching scarlet and gold minivets and a brilliant green bee eater performing against the backcloth of the cobalt blue Bhutan hills.*

*What with one thing and another we only had five days there, and spent them in taking a boat either up to the gorge or down the Manas (not the Beki where you caught your fish, because we had rivals camping there) – and now take a deep breath and prepare to believe the impossible – on the first day Fiona caught a 27-lber on 80 yards of my thread line! I wasn't watching alas, but it took her about half an hour to haul in and nobody quite knows how she did it – we were disappointed it didn't quite clock 30lbs as the record fish on the Manas is 39lbs. Daddy, believe it or not, left his rod behind so had to borrow Celia's and didn't catch a fish the whole time which was disappointing. The water was bitterly cold and Celia caught 14, 11 and 5 lbers and Fiona caught one more of 2 and that was the lot.*





Fishing in the Manas

*Needless to say Anne and I didn't see much of the rod but lazed, dreamed and watched birds. On the last morning I was lying in the long grass half asleep when I heard a rustle and looked up to see a deer peering at me from a few feet away. While I lay still he stared and sniffed but the minute I moved he was off, I wished I had just lain still and he might have come right up. I got up soon afterwards and as I came out of the grass I looked across to see a wild tusker on the other bank, he had one huge curved tusk and came down to the water's edge to have a long drink before strolling off. A lovely sight and the first wild elephant I've seen, though I must confess I was glad we had the river between us. Robert Shaw was chased by a tusker in the jeep when he was there.*

*Christmas day was much the same as the others, the Edyes took up a plastic tree which we decorated and in the evening after our change we opened our presents, the girls got four each in the end and we sat in a circle each person opening a present while everyone else looked on which made them last longer. The Catholic fathers from a nearby mission sent us a cockerel and the Christmas pudding which Daddy had been complaining about as nearly breaking the springs of the Humber tasted jolly nice, though we couldn't get it alight and Celia snatched back her three penny bits almost before we could spit them out! I wished we could have got to church but otherwise it was a pleasant and peaceful day. Celia drove us all mad on and off but still it was a happy time, we wished you were there, apart from the fishing the beauty of the surroundings would have appealed to you more this time. Fiona did several crayon sketches in between catching fish, and we all got brick red and hated leaving.*

*On the way back we spent the night with a couple called Beattie,<sup>246</sup> simply could not face the dak bungalow again and found them a very amusing couple, and a hot bath and dunlopillo mattress heaven. We drove back from Gauhati yesterday, without incident thank heaven, and got in at eight in the evening to a pile of letters and three hysterical dogs. Even the cats ran out to welcome us, complaining madly at having been left so long.*

*So that brings us up to to-day – I would like to describe it all in more detail but have so many letters to write and a pile of washing to face and a new programme of work to map out. As you have probably read we have had a very cold winter, lovely here but there have been a terrible lot of deaths elsewhere.*

*I gather your Christmas day was icy too, I hope you will get a party or two but I fear will have out-grown the teen age gang. I shall be interested to hear about the Cowans, Felicity writes regularly to Anne and sounds a real character but too young for you I suppose?!*

*My love to all, I shall be writing soon. Enjoy yourself & don't work too hard – when do you go back?*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

## 1962

Iris to Alan, Cherideo January 13th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Fiona's efforts on this machine seems to have landed us in the red<sup>247</sup> – sorry but I can't be bothered to take the ribbon off, such a messy tangly business. She and Anne have gone off to the Edyes for the week end so all is peace, I'm sitting in front of the fire on a chilly wet morning, the first rain we've had for weeks and very welcome, it's amazing how restful a day without sun can be.*

*First of all a very big thank you for the parcel of books which arrived a couple of days ago, I've always wanted to read Tolkien and know I shall love them – you and I have the same taste in books. Daddy is half way through the first one now, he started by being a bit sceptical but is now thoroughly involved with the hobbits and I'm longing for him to finish. I'll bring them home with me as it must have been a wrench for you to part with them – thank you again. Granny's parcels also arrived so we have a feast of reading in front of us. I'm re-reading "Montrose", I always enjoy Margaret Irwin though she always takes the obvious and rather exaggerated view of history. We have just finished the Civil War and with it our syllabus so are now going to do lots of brushing up, European history is our weakness though we like it best. Anything you can collect on the subject for our return will be very welcome, particularly on Charles V.*

*It's been another quiet week, the only day the others went out, club day, I retired to bed with a chill (they are getting suspicious about my illnesses which always time themselves for Mondays!) We took a picnic up the river on Sunday and tried to keep out of the way of Fiona and her boy friends who were disporting on a nearby sandbank, while we were having lunch we watched an otter swimming, fishing, and rolling in the sand in the most enchanting and unconcerned way, the first time I've seen a wild one behave like this as there normally very shy. The latest in the saga of Daphne's otter is that Maxwell is going to take it and pay all its expenses but I wonder how it'll stand being pitchforked into such an icy climate suddenly.*

*While we were up the river I was stung on the back of the hand by one of the many poisonous leaves that are around, it was agony and kept me away all night and might just have been responsible for my feeling so ill on Monday. The girls and Daddy had lukewarm reports on the Bob Hope film I missed, don't seem to have seen a good film for ages and wonder if they make them anymore.*

*Yesterday we had a visit from a young married friend of Fiona's and her brother who has just left Cambridge. He motored out, which he said was perishingly cold of all unlikely things, and is just off to work with Tibetan Refugees in Katmandu for six months – he belongs to some organisation of voluntary helpers which you probably know about, they go all over the place helping to make water supplies for backward peoples and so on. He is very shy but interesting, he went on a tour of Russia one year and was quite favourably impressed I don't know if he'll get to Nepal now as they seem to be having a little rebellion.<sup>248</sup>*

*Fiona was bundled off on Thursday to have her hair cut, she has been typically teenagish about it up to now "Its my hair, I shall do what I like with it" but the combined protests of friends and family finally prevailed and she now looks pretty, tidy and smart after looking like a badly thatched pig sty for the last several months (well perhaps not a pig sty, a barn maybe). I suppose when she gets to Art School the grubby hairy urge will return, but I shant be there to see!*

*Our dear Terry nearly caused a riot on the garden yesterday by shoving one of the labour about, you can't get away with that sort of thing nowadays and it took Daddy's tact and influence to calm them down. The girls both dote on Terry but we find him tiresome to a*

*degree with his I-am-the-lord-of-creation air he seems to think that a public school background has provided him with all he needs for a comfortable well paid existence. I seem to have said all this before! Daddy has just come in and said that we've been asked to put up a couple of Garo Air Hostesses which sounds exciting (the Garos are a hill tribe rather like the Khasis but more primitive). One of the oily boys is engaged to one of them and Fiona will probably be wild with rage at the thought of the competition, but Daddy's eyes are shining with anticipation.*

*I have a whole week end to myself (except for a lunch date to-morrow, how I hate lunch parties) and plan to make one final effort to sort out the Thirty Year War, it seems to be my blind spot, simply can't get all those silly little princes sorted out.*

*I do hope you enjoyed your stay with the Cowans, we all look forward to hearing about the family and the new house. I wonder what sort of job Martin will make of the coffee bar, it could be a real money spinner with a gay décor, a band and some really good coffee and eats – tell him Fiona will redecorate it for him. But how typical of Gran to undermine Beryl's attempts to get him into something definite and worthwhile. I don't know if you will be back at Oxford by now, but if so all our usual wishes for a good and exciting term. I feel awful about my book, the thing is that though it is not worth a thing, it took so long to write and cost so much to type that I hate to entrust it to the Indian Post. I'll bring it with me (it will arrive almost as quickly that way anyway) I don't think it's the sort of thing you could be interested in any way!*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo January 22nd 1962.

*My dear Alan,*

*Your letter from Oxford just arrived, and I am sorry to hear about your beastly cold which you've probably forgotten you ever had now. We were all very interested in the Cowans, I knew Felicity was going to be a winner but I'm glad Nicola is attractive too as I always felt a bit sorry for her. We'll cope with the battels but if there is any delay I'll write to the Bursar, he was very nice about it last time and I've had years of practice in letters to Bursars!*

*I was delighted to hear that you were thinking in terms of the U.N. as I had been for a long time, it would seem to combine a worthwhile with an interesting existence and though you wouldn't think so to hear us talk the money part really is the least important – the trouble with our job is that it is neither rewarding financially nor spiritually and I'm sure business is equally futile in all its aspects. But you'll probably change your mind again several times, Anne's essay in her last test was "on Choosing a Career" and my advice to her was to say that it didn't matter much what career you chose because your capacity for pleasure and interest could be satisfied outside or inside it, rarely both. Needless to say, she didn't believe me. She is sitting beside me now writing notes on "The Hound of Heaven", I wish I knew more about Francis Thompson.*

*The Siamese cat is sitting on a blue tea cosy, Fiona has gone out to paint, the sun is blazing, the horse is like a newly peeled chestnut after his morning clip, and after four days of racketing round we don't plan to see anyone for the next three, so feel pretty contented. The racketing hasn't consisted of much except bumping into Nazira in clouds of dust, our Chairman the Hon. Peter Remnant<sup>249</sup> is out so we felt bound to go into tennis on Saturday. He has a fat neck, fat purple-veined cheeks, rheumy, tired eyes and a general air of creased discomfort that I (most uncharitably) found a pleasure. He sat beside me for a few minutes moaning about the uncomfortable seats on the Boeing and how rotten his Oil Fired Central Heater was and then took his discomforts elsewhere. Really, I think one of life's greatest*

*pleasures is feeling sorry for the rich, though I'm sure it must come somewhere among the deadly sins too.*

*On Sunday we went in to the service and then took a curry lunch up the river, the others all swam but I just lay and waited to see the otter, I expect he was watching us with the same amusement that we watched him last time.*

*Fiona is having a tiring time with her young man who seems to be getting serious far too fast, why can't men leave relationships alone instead of trying to hurry them along from one stage to the next before anyone has adjusted themselves. Fiona thank goodness has no desire to make decisions yet, but finds it difficult to steer a course between kind encouragement and downright rudeness, we all give her a lot of unsolicited advice and the young man writes hectic letters in green ink and I daresay in a couple of months' time we shall have forgotten the whole thing. She has been having twinges of what I think is appendicitis this last week, so that would probably be the answer, tuck her up in hospital for a few weeks. A bit drastic though, I hope it doesn't come to that.*

*On Friday we had Doreen Brown<sup>250</sup> over for the day with a girl who is staying with her, the girl is the daughter of the Chairman<sup>251</sup> of the Jorhat Company and being twenty to boot we thought she would be rich and spoilt and ski-ridden. However she turned out to be a very simple, young sort of girl with a patch on her blouse, not particularly pretty either which made us like her even more.*

*In the afternoon the Cambridge undergraduate arrived to take them both to the Naga bazaar, and then they drove through the military barrier and up into the Naga hills just like that – talk about fools rushing in. Perhaps it means we shall be able to get to the river in future but it was probably just a ga-ga sentry.*

*In the evening we had Terry and John Lampett in and spent a happy few hours eating fish and chips off the carpet and discussing India, happiness, life etc. I do hope we shant be too Telly bound when we come back, and will have time to talk, we must try not to let Anne get the upper hand and cow us.*

*Yesterday it was back to Nazira again to see a most amusing film "The Trouble with Harry", a comedy thriller and very good. Daddy has spent the last couple of days in Sibsager Court as a police witness and comes back in the evening with priceless stories of the little dramas he has watched – a policeman in full uniform and one of the witnesses coming out of the court hand in hand – two members of Parliament going down to the tank to squat down and relieve themselves into it – a couple of pleaders taking a witness behind a tree and trying to rehearse him in his part without being able to find out even his name. Can you imagine the same thing translated into English, Dixon of Dock Green and the Probation officer coming hand in hand out of the local court for instance, while the Lib and Labour M.P.s squat beside the Serpentine! The trouble is if you put this on the Telly nobody would believe it.*

*Hope this torn form will arrive – Much love from us all – Mummy*

In reference to the stalling on battels, there is a typed letter from my mother in the Worcester College archives which may relate to this year.

Cherideo T.E.  
Nazira P.O.  
Assam,  
India, Jan 30th

Dear Sir,

My son, A.D.J. Macfarlane has written to say that £60 of his battels remains to be paid and I am writing to apologise for the delay in sending this. My husband will get the money home

just as soon as he is able to collect it, towards the end of this month I hope, if not at the beginning of March. I trust this will be all right.

Yours sincerely, [sig.] Iris Macfarlane      Mrs D.K. Macfarlane

Iris to Alan, Cherideo January 29th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a rather short letter. But I know how difficult it is when we are living such different lives and we do appreciate the fact that you bother to write regularly at all when you must spend most of your waking hours scratching away with the old Parker (have you still got it?) February is such a dead month anyway that one feels mentally as numb and leafless as the rest of the world looks. This is where I should toss off a few lines of "The Waste Land" but the only bit of T.S. Elliot I ever remember is the bit about wearing the bottoms of his trousers rolled which never seems appropriate somehow. Then there is E. St. V. Millay with her "My sky is full of small birds flying south" which I feel more appropriate to my age than your winter. Do you know her poetry? I think you would like it, it has a certain virility in spite of her depressing name.*

*I have just finished reading Laurens Van Der Post's new book "The Heart of the Hunter" a very touching account of the Bushmen, their legends etc., beautiful descriptive writing which I press on Anne constantly as a model. I loved it but both Fiona and I came out in a daze, read it and see if you can grasp the bit about the "first spirit".*

*We have just finished a rather depressing week end, the Moran Spree on Saturday, and a lunch party yesterday which we escaped at 6.30 p.m. with indigestion and violent headaches. Nothing could describe the Moran day less than the word Spree, the jollity being so forced and drink-induced that most people were worn out with pretending by nightfall. Fiona went on till four in the morning however and met a fascinating man of thirty which seems a little excessive even for her! Her other affair seems to have sorted itself out, the young man having gone back to his original fiancée (we think and hope) and all the clichés about being Good Friends having been taken out and aired. She has a girlfriend staying for a couple of days, a very pretty girl who has brought a trunk full of evening dresses, little does she know Nazira P.O. They will go on a grimy river picnic to-morrow and that will be the sum total of our entertainments I'm afraid.*

*Anyway to go back to the Spree, Annie played polo very bravely while I stood in six inches of mud on the sidelines, feeling slightly sick for her and swallowing brandies as fast as I could get anyone to bring them for me. She finally fell off when the polo was all over. Her horse stumbled as they were coming off the field and she was rather scratched and shaken but luckily I had one of my brandies on me and the horse wasn't hurt which was the main thing for her. It was a grey, windy spitting day and altogether we were glad to be back by our fireside by eight with the rain on the roof and the thought of all those poor wretches scraping round the dance floor to old old fashioned waltzes.*

*I met one or two people I was glad to see again, and one terrible bore who told me of all the tigers he had bagged since he came out in '36 – when he finally drew breath I said he ought to be ashamed of himself but he wasn't listening, having already embarked on descriptions of all the foxes he had blooded with the Aylesbury. Amazing that such "types" still exist, but you only have to read the letters in the Field to be sickened that there are so many of them still about.*

*The little otter went off this week, but I haven't heard if he arrived safely. Apparently his new owner is a cousin of Gavin Maxwell's, and her previous otter was shot by the Vicar.*

*We haven't seen any more of our Chairman, his trip out exhausted him and he is just off to Shillong to recuperate. Tom Darby has resigned (did I tell you?) I wish we could too in*



*some ways though there is still so much I want to see and learn about the east. It would be lovely if your job with the U.N. (you notice I have got you fixed) brought you out here for a year or two. The Camb. Undergrad is doing some Village Welfare work after he has finished with his Tibetan Refugees, and I'm sure the U.N. must have similar schemes. We could meet on leaves and visit exciting places and you could Broaden Your Outlook i.e. come round to my way of thinking on religion and philosophy! Come to think of it, from your point of view this probably sounds a very dreary programme.*

*The family have all gone to the club this evening and left me with the fire to myself, I do hope they stay nice and late. I hope the gay life isn't affecting Anne's work too much, but she wrote me a very good essay yesterday on "My School" – she'll simply have to drag her experiences out here into her exam essay it can't help but be interesting.*

*We still haven't heard about our passages, shall probably get 24 hours' notice but only have a few rags to pack. The girls plan to get hugely lucrative jobs as soon as they can, I still haven't heard about Fiona's grant (if any) so can't decide where she will be for her art, Oxford would be fine but where on earth would she live? Everything will suddenly click into place I expect, I remember these periods of indecision and blankness before. Must write to Granny now, I don't mind your hair long if its clean and well brushed but long, scruffy hair is horrible and I shall nag you about it unceasingly!*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo T.E., February 6th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Well the planets don't seem to have conjoined to any purpose, and the world goes on for good or ill, I must say there have been several occasions during the last few days when we've thought that now would be the moment – but on the whole this particular bit of the world is hard to leave now. The coolies have been mildly excited about it and drums have been beating day and night and the holy men making themselves a rare old fortune. Now I hear that some people feel done down that nothing did happen and are planning to beat up their astrologers.*

*It has been sultry and oppressive, just like earthquake weather, but I hope it's just rain coming which we badly need. Peach and plum blossom are out and some of the hot weather birds are twanging away, spring creeping up on you here and isn't particularly welcome at that.*

*Your last letter has just arrived, we were interested to hear about Geoffrey, we had just been talking about him and wondering if he was back from the East. Is he going to do mission work?*

*Talking of letters, Daphne had one to say that the little otter Tarka reached London and was ecstatically received by his (or rather her) new owners who were originally the owners of Edal in the book. The journey didn't upset Tarka a bit, and within a few hours Gavin Maxwell was round to see her and lying on the floor of Daphne's cousin's flat drooling. Tarka's home is by a loch with two burns running through the garden so she really couldn't have come to a better resting place, we must get the address and go and see her if we are passing.*

*Not a very exciting week, Fiona went to a party on Saturday night and clicked in at 5.30 a.m. with her escort who flopped into Annes bed – luckily we'd had the forethought to remove Anne! It was John Lampett (do you remember him?) who spent Sunday with us but we none of us had the energy to go to the river and went for a walk up to the first ridge of the Naga hills instead – the first time we've done so for years and we felt very daring but didn't meet a soul.*

*Yesterday there was no polo so I spent the afternoon in the library trying to re-sort the books, incredible how people seem quite incapable of putting a book back where they find it. I got very dirty and dizzy, I shall be giving up the library soon, its soul destroying here as nobody appreciates good books, or in fact anything you get.*

*I have embarked on the Lord of the Rings now that Daddy has finished the first volume and am absolutely immersed, I get the feeling all the time that it's a country I know and half remember, whether from fairy tales or dreams or what I don't know. I have always had the sneaking feeling that the Little People are still around and sometimes catch sight of one out of the corner of one eye, intimations of immortality or just genetic heritage? Whatever it is, I find Frodo and Co quite fascinating and will be blissfully happy in their company for several weeks. I wish I had read them to you when you were small, but they weren't there were they? I got Roberts book this week too, but have only dipped into it., it looks very interesting though I was rather horrified to read his descriptions of one or two things – people sitting in "serried ranks" for instance – must obviously introduce him to the Fowler Bros. before he bursts into print again.*

*This is Race Week, the official rounding off of the cold weather festivities with lots of grisly goings on in Jorhat but we are only going to attend one of them. Haven't had a visit from the Chairman yesterday but I met Mrs Remnant at a coffee party last Friday, poor thing she is worried by almost every complaint, looks ill and swollen and exactly like Catherine de Medici and filled me with my usual comforting thoughts about the futility of money. All her daughters seem to be divorced to add to it all.*

*We still haven't heard about our passages but the descriptions of English weather we get don't make us want to hurry back just at the moment. I have just been filling in the entry forms for Anne's exam, shall be glad when the wretched thing is over, I've enjoyed the work up to now but am beginning to feel a sense of strain which I'm doing my best to hide.*

*I'm glad you did well in your exams<sup>252</sup> we take it for granted that you always will but you must be glad that the exam period of your life is coming to an end, you've had more than your fair share over the past few years. Didn't you say Tolkien was in Oxford. Couldn't you go and see him? I would love to know what is "behind" his books, what exactly is the power of the Ring for instance.*

*Next morning & Anne in bed with a bilious attack and a threatening sky – but expect both will clear soon.*

*Much love from us all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo February 14th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*An interesting letter yesterday, full of exciting doings that made us very envious, the thought of doing something really civilised again like going to a play or even a film less than ten years old is delicious. The odd thing is that when we are at home we never go, or have any desire to go, anywhere! We still don't know when or how we are getting home, the company is being very unhelpful about cheap passages but presumably something will happen, it would be nice for Fiona to take part in some of your May celebrations, one dance anyway, she could stay with Uncle Ernest perhaps. Or Robert. Plenty of time to fix it anyway. She's away for a week staying with Nita Rigby on the next garden which seems a bit silly, but it gives her a change and Nita is rather lonely having fought with most of the ladies of Sonari P.O.*

*We had our visit from the Chairman and Mrs Remnant last Friday, the day we had planned to go up to Jorhat to the final of the Robert Cup, and had fixed a picnic on the way with the Highams, but in the end the girls had to go alone as they (Rs) didn't leave till 5 p.m.*

Lunch was quite amusing actually as Remnant and I got involved in a fierce argument about Capital Punishment (he is naturally for it, the more the better) which somehow led on to other fiercer arguments about public schools and vivisection. Mrs R. who is dumpy and kind made soothing noises, and I somehow don't think we shall ever find ourselves on the Board. He told us a long story about a spaniel he had which irritated him so much that he shot it – I said tartly that it was lucky we didn't all go round shooting everything that irritated us and Daddy nearly choked on his cold cabbage salad. They only gave one day's notice of their arrival so we had to cut off a bit of the dogs meat, and then half an hour before they came we heard they wanted to sleep after lunch so the dhobi was breathing hotly on the sodden sheets until a few minutes before their arrival.

The polo match was exciting and Nazira won, Fiona stayed on in Jorhat with Doreen and Gussel Brown and got involved in a whirl of cocktail parties and dances most of which bored her. There were two other girls there but she was able to hold her own although they were twenty and fresh from England, she was rather horrified to be told by them that the social life of Assam was much more exciting than London, the men more attractive and interesting – I can't really believe this, though perhaps they are a little older and more sophisticated. You must produce something attractive and gay as can be, so as to encourage her when she arrives. Actually she now prefers quiet men, and I think its Anne who will be the flibberty gibbet, very pretty too I think.

She and I are now drifting back through our work, trying to take a Broad View – I am collecting information and writing theses on subjects like "The Rise and Fall of Spain" and "The French-Hapsburg Quarrel" which seem obvious choices for questions. At present I'm working on "The Church through the Ages" which will keep me happy till we sail. Of course it should be Anne who is doing this but somehow at fifteen one can't be selective enough, I am very doubtful of her passing History but nevertheless she has a real interest and understanding of it even though she can't yet express it.

We are supposed to be having a Garo Air Hostess coming to stay tomorrow, the Garos are a hill tribe, very backward and this girl is the first to become a hostess – nevertheless she is disappointingly fat and dull – at least on first acquaintance. She is engaged to one of the men working on the Pipe Line. It all seems a bit odd as he is 34 and must have had the choice of the world as he moves around all over the place as Civil Engineer, we feel he is probably Taking Advantage of the poor girl and will leave her flat – will let you know!

We are taking boats up the river on Sunday, maybe our last fishing effort this year and won't be very successful as the water is very low but it will restore us after the cocktail party that the Chairman is giving for us on Saturday – presumably on the expense account. We all go to the club and stand round self-consciously trying to pretend that this is somehow different from any other club evening. I really must write a Telly play about our rousing revels but I suppose they are no worse than those of any other small closed community.

Its warming up and the hot weather sights and smells and sounds are starting, frogs croaking, doves cooing, birds and butterflies bustling and a heavy scented air pouring out of every bush and tree. We are having strawberries and peas at nearly every meal, but a horrible fungus has attacked my tomatoes which are shrivelling and crumpling in rows, horrid to watch.

If you ever see old "O" level exam papers being sold, could you get a few, History & English particularly. Much love from us all, Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 21st February 1962

My dear Alan,

*A nice letter from you just received, and I'm answering in rather a sleepy mood – partly the weather which is sleepy in itself, heavy with rain that won't fall, and partly because of a late night last night and the night before and before that. In fact we have had rather a riotous few days for us, and I've actually enjoyed the riot. But now I've had enough and want to retire with my history notes and not see anyone for weeks.*

*On Saturday Milly the Garo girl arrived (such an incongruous name for a Garo) and stayed till Monday. She turned out to be a nice, plump, simple creature who read stories in Home Chat and told naive stories about the other girls in the Y.W.C.A. hostel, really can't see what her fiancé, who is thirty four and well-travelled can see in her. It was interesting to hear of her childhood in the hills, the whole family living off their rice fields and weaving, and seeing her sitting in a twin-set talking about Calcutta films was surprising and rather sad.*

*On Saturday evening was the company cocktail party which turned out to be less gruesome than we had feared, although most of our bonhomie was drink-induced I must admit. On Sunday we took two boats up the river and spent a lovely soothing day lying on a rock, swimming, reading and eating salad and tinned crab which John Lampett brought. We see a lot of him these days, he's such a nice person and I'd love him as a son in law but at twenty eight I fear he's too old – anyway I don't think he wants to marry either of the girls which hampers my match making.*

*In the evening we joined with a gang of the lads and sang round a camp fire for an hour or two, it's a funny thing how much happier both Daddy and I feel with the young than with our own generation who all seem stuffy and dull and bogged down with trivialities.*

*I don't think the "immortal longings" you describe will fade, but whether you will be able to trap them is another thing. I have often thought along those lines, and have recently been milling over an idea connected with legends of India (brought on by Lord of the Rings I expect) and of trying to collect and interpret them in some way that will clear my own mind and bring out some shining Truth that runs through and yet transcends them. I don't suppose I ever will, because the feeling one gets from beauty is impossible to describe or account for – not only beauty – I feel my scalp prickle and tears come to my eyes when I read about the death of Sir Thomas More or one of Queen Elizabeth's speeches. The closest anyone seems to have come to describing it is Moment of Truth but that is so overworked a phrase, Zen Buddhism has some good shots and Wordsworth doesn't do badly – anyway you should be thankful that you feel it at all because a surprising amount of people don't. When we were reading Francis Thompson I tried to describe the feeling to Anne and she just couldn't grasp what I was talking about.*

*I think your ideas of teaching for a year or two are good, what about the Peace Corps which I see is looking for volunteers? You could collect lots of material for writing – as you see my scheming is all directed to getting you out here for a year or two!*

*To return to our gaiety, on Monday there was a film at the club, but as it was elections there was no drink sold (don't ask me the connection) so you can imagine the gloom that prevailed – however the film was "Look back in Anger" which was superb, much as I hate John Osborne I must admit this got me. Very funny, touching, moving and stirring, and beautifully acted – it made all the other films we've had seem like drivel which they are of course. I do hope we shall be able to see Luther when we come home.*

*On Tuesday afternoon we went up with the Highams to see the polo match between the Assam Co and the Jorhat Co – the result was a foregone conclusion but the score 9-1 to them even more conclusive than we thought. Afterwards we, plus John Lampett, went to a Punjabi restaurant and had a lovely meal of curry and Chinese chow, very hilarious and even a puncture on the way home didn't damp us and I've never seen a tyre being changed laughingly before!*

*I felt a little battered next morning however, and was rather horrified when Daddy brought our new Director, Sir Owaine Jenkins<sup>253</sup> to the bungalow for drinks, however he turned out to be charming, keen and interested in trees and birds and so easy and relaxing to talk to – the first time we have had a human director and perhaps things will improve as a result.*

*Daddy is supposed to be on leave at the moment but has a new toy in the factory, a conveyor belt to carry one pile of tea to join another which he has invented, it keeps him happy and out from under my feet.*

*We still don't know about our passage, I'd better stop saying this and tell you when we do know, when exactly is your vac? I fear we shall miss it anyway, what a pity, I'm sure you could have helped us a lot.*

*Anne is writing notes on J.P's at the moment, her late nights haven't helped her work, I should be really firm but I feel in some ways the social life is as important a part of her education as Carter and Mears. Must write a line to Celia who has had a mild recurrence of her heart trouble, we were sad about old Haslam.*

*Much love from us all –Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo March 1st 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Auspicious day<sup>254</sup> – we are spending it like any other except that Daddy is remarking gloomily at intervals that I'd never have married him if I'd Known, and the cook made a special pudding for lunch which didn't quite work out. Daddy sent for Ogden Nash's Collected Poems for me which were out of stock, and went in to get a bottle of sherry and found it was Rs 47 so didn't get it naturally and this has made him still gloomier. Myself I consider we are very lucky, after twenty one years we have good health, three nice children and still love each other, and I don't think one could ask much more. No money of course but half a house in the most beautiful place in the world which is worth a million to me.*

*It's a beautiful day and I've got rid of a horrid cold that has been bothering me which probably contributes to my happy mood. Anne is doing an English Language Test and Fiona is drawing the mali and there is a general air of peace and purpose abroad – also all the first butterflies, very bright and glittering and newly hatched. For the last couple of days there has been heavy rain, hail, storms and wind and now it looks as if someone had been out with a pot of green paint, everything is just bursting into leaf.*

*We had a quiet week end, it rained all the time anyway, a wet Sunday in Assam really does try ones resources but we had John Lampett here for the day with all his colour slides of Delhi, Benares etc. so that helped. Our film has come back, it seems to be mostly the horse but there is one nice one of the Manas and one of the baby otter and some gay Nagas in red cloaks.*

*On Sunday evening the girls went to a party in one of the bachelors bungalows which ended with one of the young men turning his managers Land Rover upside down in a ditch – an extraordinary youth who is the latest addition to the Assam Co. Where they pick up these dissolute types I can't imagine, he goes round boasting that he was in trouble with the police at home and only came out here to clear his debts and is permanently drunk. Luckily he was alone in the car, and how he managed to get out alive nobody knows – nor what the repercussions have been. Not very edifying for Anne, but she might as well get used to these sordid facts. On the whole I'm much happier about the girls here than at home where the standard of morals is abysmally low it seems, if not non-existent.*

*I had a letter from Lancs. Education Board or whatever they call themselves yesterday, saying they couldn't give grants to foreign students – really I wonder what lunatic asylum*

*they recruit their secretaries from, I explained in great detail Fiona's status. Anyway I shall leave it now till I get home – they did add that a grant they would give would be for the Lancaster School of Arts and Crafts which sounds a bit dismal. Personal contact is the thing at this stage I think. Are there any hostels in Oxford where Fiona could stay if she went there? I can't help feeling that her best bet mightn't be to go to France for a year on an "au Pair" job and go to evening art classes, anyway we shall see.*

*I wonder how your love life is going now? I think one must expect to be hurt quite a lot where relations with the other sex are concerned, but it is worth it and all adds up to the business of living. The dread of getting "involved" with another person leads to a sterile and empty existence, though there are degrees of involvement I must admit. But there are so many degrees of loving too, and nobody can really give advice. Fiona is reading the Bhagavad Gita at the moment and keeps hurling questions like "Mummy what is the Ultimate Reality?" at me when I'm seeing the cook.*

*Chaos has just ensued as Fiona has suddenly been offered a lift to Shillong and has packed a bag, eaten lunch and gone all in the space of an hour. I only hope she will be all right, it is one of the Oily Boys, the one engaged to the Garo girl who stayed with us – he is very vague to put it mildly and I shall worry until I hear from her and then go on worrying about how she is going to get back. However she was desperately keen to go back and say goodbye to her friends and I hadn't the heart to stop her.*

*We have now heard that a passage is more or less definitely booked for us on the "Canton" leaving on May 8th and arriving on Granny's birthday. This is a bit later than I'd wanted but it will mean Daddy will only have about six weeks on his own and it will be less expensive. I feel happier now that I know, I was beginning to feel we'd never get away. It'll mean we shall have to do our revising on the boat which might be difficult but we shall have to manage somehow.*

*When is your vac, and when do you want that £10? Is it for the vac? As usual I'm afraid you will be short, what about taking a job for a couple of weeks, to earn some cash – something purely physical which could rest you at the same time? Watsons Café for instance? Or Martins?*

*[From my father] Sorry about the ending of this BUT I think I can manage without the physical job. Feeling much happier now that passages have been booked and something definite happening at last. Have been reading all your letters with great interest but am terrified with all the knowledge you have accumulated! I am hoping that being a simple chap (me) we shall, still, have something in common. Looking forward to seeing you very much, very soon, Lots of love, Daddy (What an effort!)*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo March 8th 1962*

*My dear Alan,*

*I hope this will catch you before you leave Oxford, have just got your dates and you go down? – earlier than I thought. I hope to enclose a cheque in this, but will be getting an exact statement of the situation in your next letter probably. It'll be easier for you when I'm home and can send you dribbles, but I'm afraid you'll never really have enough till you are earning your own! We have at last got our passages, on the "Canton" which leaves Bombay on May 8th and arrives on 26th. This is later than I'd hoped, and leaves very little time to get acclimatised but Daddy is delighted as he will only have about six weeks on his own. I'm afraid we shall miss your May Balls too, but you were probably not going to indulge in many, they must be expensive luxuries. Perhaps you will be able to come to London to meet us, I'm waiting to find out when exactly Anne's exam is, if it's the beginning of June we shall probably stay down till it's over. I want to take her to see "Luther" and "Twelfth Night" if I*



can, but cant plan anything. If we do stay in London we could come and see your room and everything, sitting here on my verandah with only birdsong and lime blossom as company it seems impossible to visualise myself catching trains and going to plays but I suppose it will happen.

It's exactly a week since Fiona left for Shillong and we haven't heard a word from her, the wretch. The oil man who took her and returned with rather involved stories of their trip, and each time he told them they were slightly different. I got in a panic and realised that I had nothing to rely on but his word that she had arrived at all, and she might be dead in a ditch and by the time I'd pondered this for a sleepless night she was, and he was an escaped convict and homicidal maniac! I wrote to an Indian couple who had gone to Shillong at the same time and asked if they'd seen her, and got no answer as they were still away. At last yesterday I heard from them that Fiona had been seen alive and well in Shillong, and felt very ashamed of all the horrible thoughts I'd had about poor Gil the oil man. All this because Fiona didn't send me the wire she promised, I'll rend her when I do see her. I'm hoping she will be back to-day or to-morrow with another Indian couple, and no more wild trips with strangers after that. Gil wasn't really a stranger, he is engaged to the Garo girl I told you about, but there is something odd about him and he is one of those people who tells such fantastic stories one doesn't know which are true, if any. Golly, wont I be glad to get the girls safely married to Nice Men.

Anne and I drove hundreds of miles last Saturday to go to a gymkhana and polo tournament, the last she will ever attend. John Lampett came with us, we had to leave at 7 and drive for nearly three hours but it was a pleasant day, Anne's horse was surprised and pained at having to play musical chairs and eggs and spoons but took it in good part, if rather ponderously, so she didn't win anything. I sat in the blazing sun screwing up my eyes and talking for hours and hours so ended with a splitting headache, but we didn't stay for the dance and got back at ten, absolutely whacked.

There was a horrible accident just near the club we went to, an enormous lorry full of bits of the pipe line over-turned on a corner, luckily it was dark by the time we passed it and the bodies had been removed, I believe there were at least six. The roads are choking with all this oil drilling going on, a solid mass of lorries are hurtling down the middle and never moving to one side, several people we know have been hit by them and narrowly avoided death, I suppose as in the tea industry all the profits from oil will go to the central government in Delhi and nothing will be given to Assam to improve its standard of living. I can't think why this state are so solidly behind Congress who has done nothing for them. (I couldnt have made more "common errors of the English language" as in that last sentence if I'd tried).

Since then life has been quiet, we went to "The Five Pennies" again on Monday but since have been working quite hard, Anne is doing a Biology test at the moment, she got back her first History test the other day with the remark "Facts good but style unpolished" I don't know what sort of polish they expect from a fifteen year old who has to answer six questions in two hours! Anyway facts are what is chiefly needed (are what is?) in 'O' level. I would be grateful if you could send out those exam questions if you have copied them, History chiefly, specially European, and English Lang. I shall get back too late now to do much about anything. The sea voyage should give us a nice quiet period to revise, but sea voyages are somewhat distracting too.

Your descriptions of spring were homesick-making, it will be over when we arrive, and I shant see another for four years, how sad how sad. Here the weather is still cold and fresh as we are getting storms at night, the mulberries are ripening and being eaten by the birds as fast as they do in spite of dear little silver paper men that the malis made and hang in the

*trees. We've had so many strawberries that I made some jam yesterday, not very successfully as Daddy kept saying "Surely its ready" so I took it off before it was.*

*To-night there is a farewell party for three of our senior managers who are leaving (including the Darbys). I hate these things everyone gets terribly maudlin and bursts into song – ug!*

*I have nearly finished "The Ring" but I'm trying to make it last as I don't want to come to the end, I feel sometimes it is almost more real than my real life.*

*Much love & a happy vac – Mummy  
Daddy is out, & I can't wait so am sending this money pro tem till I find out from him the situation & hear from you.*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo March 18th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Anne has been using the typewriter for making lists of French verbs and it has ground to a standstill in protest – hence this illegible scrawl. Late too, I keep sending for Airgraph Forms and finding Nazira P.O. has run out! You'll be glad to hear that Fiona is back in our bosom, after sending telegrams & ringing up the Shillong police, we found her sitting in the bungalow very surprised and grieved that I'd been worrying. She had been staying in the Convent and been as safe as safe, when she got my first telegram she had sent one back but it took 3 days & arrived after her – looking back I can't quite think why I was in such a flap but I felt physically sick & exhausted the whole ten days. Now she's gone off again on "a painting visit" with a young married friend – she has been doing some wonderful portraits & I'm sure will make herself a fortune if she keeps it up.*

*We had the Rosses staying for the week-end to listen to the Scotland-England Rugger match, the men spent the evening chewing their nails to the quick, thumping the wireless, & shouting "We were robbed"! I must say it was rather a shame but Betty and I weren't very sympathetic and were consequently lucky to get away without being bitten, thumped and shouted at. Daddy said your man played very well.*

*On Sunday we played golf & wished we were up the river, its warming up now & the air is like a warm weight on our head. To-morrow is Holi, the big Spring festival of the Hindus when we usually have rain, in fact it's part of the ceremony & to do with propitiating mother earth & very ominous if it doesn't come.*

*The daffodils must be dancing for you, how wonderful, I shant see them for years except (wait for it!) with my "inward eye". I wonder if any of the Gang will be up for Easter, let us know about them & Martin's Café & everything. Please thank Granpa for a letter, we're waiting for news of Angela. I'm glad you saw Julie again, did she fail her "A" levels or is she just waiting for a place.*

*For Fiona's birthday we're motoring 80 miles to spend the night in a mosquitoey Forest Bungalow, then on another 40 miles to look at some ruins – Daddy is sunk in gloom at the prospect!*

*I will send another £5 in my next letter, is this all you are going to need for the vac? i.e. have you any grant left at all? Daddy has sold his gun & is going to sell the car – just in case you think we aren't trying! I'll be writing to Granny in a few days. Much love to all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo March 28th 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Herewith another little dribble, hope you haven't had to borrow too much, perhaps Richard will be able to give you a lift down South? I'm so sorry to hear about his distress*

*over the boy's death, a ghastly thing to happen, I do hope he is feeling a little better about it now.*

*A nice long letter from you, and the exam papers, for which thank you very much. Our exam (London) is supposed to be much easier than O. and C. but we found we could cope quite well, French was potty, History ditto, but English Lang not so. We had guests that evening, and had a hilarious time asking them definitions, Anne produced the classic one, "Septomaniac" to describe a man in his seventies! She only got 40% for her last English Test and is depressed and takes vocabulary lists to bed with her but I fear it's too late to make much difference now. It's just a matter of luck if she gets words she knows. I cheer her on with the fact you failed your English Lang. at O level and Look at you Now!*

*It was Saturday evening and we had the Edyes for the night and John Lampitt and Terry for the evening, rather chaotic as I remembered five minutes before dinner that I only had five soup bowls and four glasses. The cook apparently forgot we had guests at all and produced a tiny pile of meat so we had to pretend we were vegetarians until the tinier heap of peas were handed round when we decided it was too hot to eat anyway. Luckily they were all friends and we were talking so hard it didn't matter.*

*The Edyes brought their projector and we showed all the Manas film and the baby otter and John's films of Delhi and South India and listened to the Rugger match and played the gramophone and altogether it was fun.*

*On Sunday we took a picnic up the river, Celia had another sort of heart attack a little while ago so she just lay on the bank, but we swam and boated, the water was warm as milk and afterwards we ate a huge curry, dozed, tried to do the Manchester Guardian crossword (unsuccessfully) and watched a colony of lesser Hornbills in the wild banana trees opposite. If only Assam was more of that and less of the club how idyllic it would be.*

*Daddy has been given Whistlers "Book of Indian Birds" by someone who is leaving and is very keen, I wish we could afford some field glasses for him, when we come back we are going to build a hide in the jungle and bird watch seriously as they are unbelievably various and lovely here.*

*On Monday I gave the club a miss and went to distribute the prizes at the local school sports instead. I watched the end of a football match and there was the usual meeting and I was elected President and most of the Agenda consisted of "Remarks from the Chair" and "Presidential Addresses". One huge hairy boy of about twenty four won all the prizes, and his wife,(?) a matronly female rather older, swept the board in the Girls section! I gave my speeches in English and then the headmaster got up and "translated" them, actually he said all the things I should have said but didn't, such as how rapturously I had enjoyed the football match and how my husband hoped to be able to give the school lots of financial assistance in the coming year. Pathetic, and one longs to be able to help but how? I shall really try to do my bit when I come back, that's what I always say, but first it means learning their language and there are no books and nobody to teach.*

*Fiona's birthday the day after to-morrow and as usual our present hasn't arrived – a stole – so I fear it will be like any other day. We are setting off to-morrow to spend the evening in a forest bungalow about three hours away from here, and then on to look at some ruins on Sunday. As it is very hot now, and mosquitoes at their fiercest, I can see the whole expedition being somewhat of an ordeal but perhaps funny in retrospect.*

*We went to have our hair cut on Wednesday and found ourselves impaled on vast lumps of mud that they had been throwing up, got clear of those and decided we had better turn back and try another road and while we were turning the mud bank started to crumble and the Humber hung trembling over a deep, dank duck pond for several breathless seconds. The other road turned out to be under repair too but by driving for several miles across rice*

*fields (dry and riceless luckily) we got there, trembling with nervous exhaustion. I hope Anne will get "A visit to the hairdresser" as an essay question.*

*We were interested in your new girl, who sounds sweet, I hope she will still be when you get back, it must be jungle warfare with all those men about. As you say, Fiona will find undergrads rather young but there must be post grads and research students and things too – anyway she is pretty young herself in spite of her own opinion to the contrary. I will have to leave the whole thing till we get home.*

*If you could find accommodation for her, it would be nice if she could go back for a day or two after we arrive, she could then visit the Ruskin School of Art and see what the chances are of getting in. She might get a job in Oxford and go to evening classes instead, she rather regrets now that she didn't do her "A" levels, perhaps I should have insisted, it's so difficult to know.*

*Our love to everyone, delighted about Angela. Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo 9th April 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Still typewriterless, so shant be able to say anything on this. Have just seen the girls off for a week-end with the Edyes, as its been raining for 24 hours & there is now a thunderstorm in progress I can't imagine what they will do with themselves – but I rather selfishly pushed them off so as to have time to myself. It's quite cold & this morning Fiona picked a basketful of mushrooms which I ate with scrambled eggs in bed – delicious.*

*Our expedition last week-end was fun, though we none of us slept a wink in the forest bungalow, the hot Springs turned out to be a sullen grey-green pond bubbling in a sinister & sulphurous way (I imagined Gollum to be at the bottom) & the ancient ruins at Dimapur were being used as a refuse dump by the military – it is only 40 miles from Kohima. Nevertheless, as is usually the case in India, we got surprise pleasures where we didn't expect them to make up for the main disappointments – a beautiful river near the Forest Bungalow where we sat above a waterfall & watched 3 otters playing, at Dimapur a row of scarlet-cloaked Nagas sitting on a bench having their hair cut – and on the long & dusty drive (longer by far than we thought so we only had a bottle of tepid water between us) three beautiful hill-girls with orchids in their hair.*

*Your birthday letter to Fiona arrived the day before, we gave her a rather lovely Indian stole & John Lampitt a book of Tagore's painting and the Edyes £1 so she did quite well. Julia has asked us all to stay a few days after we arrive, but I've said only F will, then she can come over to Oxford & visit the Ruskin School of Art, she now feels she would also like to take a course in something else as well, Philosophy perhaps – can one go to evening classes in various subjects? She might get a job nearby that would leave her evenings free – or as an under-matron in one of the millions of schools?*

*We will send some more money this month, will juggle with the battels & hope to give you enough for a new pair of shoes! I know it's not easy but as long as we don't let it get us down too much we shall all appreciate money so much more when we have some! Will try to bring my typewriter home for you & perhaps you'll sell some of your writing? Love to Granny & Granpa, delighted to hear about Emma, will be writing to them in a day or two. Boat Race today. Much love, Mummy*



Donald by the ancient monoliths of Kachari ruins at Dimapur

Iris to Alan [undated, but must have been written in mid-April (Monday 16th), and is on Assam Company headed notepaper. It was sent thus as there was a cheque enclosed.]

*My dear Alan,*

*Another small contribution, which I hope will cover a pair of shoes! Could you, out of your grant, pay the £20 of last term's battels and £65 of this and leave yourself with £15 and I will give you a cheque for the remaining battels as soon as I arrive – Daddy will have got the money for the car by then. I will be able to send you driblets of money when I'm there which will make it easier. Perhaps they'll increase your grant still further for your last year!*

*Only three weeks till we leave, and a certain amount of sewing on of buttons is taking place and Daddy is flapping madly about our passports but by and large we don't really feel as if we're coming. Its warming up and we have fans in the afternoon but there has been quite a lot of rain too and the mushroom season is in full swing, Fiona collects basketfuls every morning and so far none of us has succumbed.*

*Last week end she and Anne went to stay with the Edyes and Daddy and I had a quiet couple of days, at least Sunday wasn't all that quiet as I had promised to go and open a village library. It turned out to be a little mud hut with a table inside on which were a handful of old, paper covered books, but they had stretched an ancient typewriter ribbon across the door which I duly cut, and then we sat and waited for an hour for the two other dignitaries who had been invited. Neither of them turned up, and the public meeting consisted of me, a microphone, six small boys and a couple of old old men who had dropped in for a chat and a quiet smoke. I felt so sorry for the organisers, but they didn't seem*

*particularly worried and each got up and shouted for half an hour through the microphone as if they had a large and impressionable audience!*

*This took the whole of a hot afternoon which Daddy spent sleeping under the fan, I arrived back very depressed at the hopelessness of life out here, at least in some of its aspects, and a longing to do something about it –but what? Then when I picked up a paper and read what Princess Margaret had spent on redecorating her house...!!*

*I started this on Friday and then found that the third Spring Festival was in progress and the post office shut for three days, so this Monday morning, 6.30 a.m. with a heavy mist blotting out the hills. We have spent the last two days up the river, no fishing now of course but the water warm as milk. We were joined both days by various young men, including a new arrival who is fat and pink and solemn so Fiona has no qualms now about coming home. On our way to the river yesterday a huge stone flew up and made a large dent in the car to Daddy's rage and horror, just when he is about to sell it. Actually we've had several offers and it's a question of playing them off against each other.*

*There doesn't seem to be much news, Anne and I are busy revising and feeling confident and despondent in about equal proportions, some days she seems bright and perceptive and other dim to a degree, it'll be just a matter of luck if she has her papers on her good days.*

*We hear our ship is very friendly but has no swimming pool on the tourist deck, ah well nothing could ever be as bad as the voyage we did with you all after the war and I shall have to keep reminding myself of that as I lie panting in the Red Sea. I can't let you know arrival times till later, if Fiona did come and spend a day or two in Oxford could you find her a room. She is hawking at the moment, but I think it would be a good opportunity for her to look around and to go to the Art School but it depends really on whether there's anywhere for her to stay.*

*I don't seem to be able to find your letter in which you gave your dates but fancy you will have left Field Head by now and be at camp. I hope your idyll with Judy will continue through the summer term, but I suppose in Oxford one must constantly steel oneself against disappointments in that line? I'm reading the most amusing book at the moment "Promise at Dawn" by Romain Gary, you'd enjoy it. I wonder what the new musical "Camelot" is like, I can't help feeling they're treading on sacred ground, but T.H. White seems quite satisfied so I suppose we shouldn't grumble. Almost our last club day to-day, thank heaven, the only reason I shall be glad the girls aren't here is that I shan't have to go to the club.*

*Sorry for this very uninspired effort, the mist seems to have filtered in through my ears and is lying like a wad of Cotton wool on my brain – but I don't suppose Letters from Mum play a very vital part in your life just at the moment!*

*Much love, have a wonderful term - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo April 23rd 1962*

*My dear Alan,*

*A real scorcher of 91 degrees to-day and even Fiona has decided against her three long walks (she's slimming but after a week of drastic exercise and hardly any food weighs two pounds more than before!) We shan't have much peace from the heat now until we reach the channel and all your weary descriptions of rain and wind sound lovely to us, Daddy's horror is that it will be hot this summer!*

*I think you must be back at Oxford by now, and I hope found Things the same as when you left?! Write to us at Aden and Port Said and let us know if you can whether you have found some accommodation for Fiona, for two nights say, it won't be worth her coming for less and if you can't find her a bed she will come straight back with us and leave the visit to Julia till*



later. She wants to get a job fairly quickly to earn a bit of money so that she won't have to be working all summer.

We spent Easter Sunday on our last river picnic (we say that every time, but have now decided we shall take our breakfast up this Sunday for positively the last time). We went with the Pooles and the Highams and it was a memorable Easter because we were all cavorting in the water when we practically bumped into a corpse. We had seen some men in a boat and hadn't taken much notice of what they were doing and realised too late that they were carting a body through our midst, very unpleasant, it was a sepoy who had drowned on Friday and had just come to the surface, we didn't feel like swimming again for several hours. Otherwise it was a pleasant day and not too hot, we'd had heavy rain a few days before when the Padre and his wife came to stay.

That was Thursday, and he came to give Easter Communion, but after a fearful journey over flooded roads with him getting out in his white cassock to wipe mud off the windscreen every ten minutes, we got to Nazira to find two people had turned up. Really I feel sorry for the Church out here it must be very disheartening. This padre is only fairly recent to the Cloth, he was a business man until six years ago, and his wife doesn't seem to have taken too easily to the change, she is madly smart with bleached hair and masses of make-up and a tendency to hare off to the bar as soon as the service is finished. I didn't take to her terribly, he seems nice but incredibly tired all the time, and hardly able to keep his eyes open let alone talk. I can't help feeling that the church should be a little more choosy about whom it ordains, and there should be other jobs open to men who aren't physically or mentally up to standard, more in line with the Catholics in fact.

Yesterday I went in to check through the library prior to handing over and spent a suffocating afternoon dripping over the books and rubbing my dusty hands over my face till I looked like a muddy pool – but at least all the books came back which was something.

On Saturday we went up to Jorhat to do some shopping for presents, we set off with our breakfast at seven, and ate it on the ruined palace near Sibsagar which was very pleasant in the early morning sunlight with not a horrible human in sight. Our shopping was fairly successful, until it came to looking for a dry cleaners when we drove round in dusty circles for what seemed like several hours and finally ran it to earth in the middle of the high street within a few feet of the policeman we had asked. By the time we had finished all this and driven home we had lost the first exaltation of our morning picnic and our "Buys" looked small and shabby but I think we might be able to get things on the boat which will have just left Hong Kong.

Our programme is to leave here on May 5th, spend the night in Dum Dum Airport and fly to Bombay on the 6th. We'll have the 7th in Bombay which will be hot but theres a nice swimming pool and an air conditioned cinema and we embark on 8th. Our passports are back and injections finished and now it's just a question of squeezing everything in.

Anne and I are finding work tiresome now, I think we've been going on too long without a break and are getting stale, revision is always a bore. On the boat we shall just read lots of French and write lots of essays.

You should start keeping a note book in which you jot down all the odd people and events (like the diary that girl leant you) that might work into a story or novel, I often wish I'd done that as I've met some extraordinary characters in my travels and remember so few of them. I'll hand them on to you in future, I should never have the energy to type all those thousands of words again.

I'm glad about your typewriter by the way, this is a heavy creature and I wasn't much looking forward to taking it home though Anne does all her work on it and says she can't work any other way now.

*About Fiona, she will probably be going to Julia for two or three days from 27th so would want a bed for 30th and 31st approx. perhaps one of your girlfriends could find her a place in a hostel. I feel so out of touch and really haven't the least idea of the chances of her getting to Art school or even a clear picture of what she will do when she does get there. Much love – only a month till we see you – wonderful! Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo May 2nd 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Anne is grinding out her last notes on the typewriter (I'm leaving my Fisher behind, he's too heavy to take) so will pen my last epistle from Nazira P.O. Can't believe we only have two more days here, piles of rubbish are collecting in corners and a lot of mending taking place but so far we haven't tried to fit anything into a suitcase – wailing & gnashing of teeth will ensue when we do as half of it will have to be flung out.*

*The rain has come to break the awful hot spell so bending over is now possible without becoming blinded with sweat. We went up the river for breakfast on Sunday and had a lovely last swim to exorcise the corpse, when we got back at 12.30 we found a couple of friends & their dear little destructive kiddies had come to visit us. They had lunch and tea and only broke one camp bed and a salt cellar so I suppose we were lucky. As soon as they left we had to go & have some more tea with the Punjabi carpenter, thought we were in for a session of curry & Indian sweetmeats but he gave us sardine sandwiches & mangos, delicious, but we were all exhausted by then & crawled into bed at 8 and slept for 12 hours.*

*Monday was our last club day, can't say I was sorry to see the last of the place but Fiona had a few pangs at the last moment, only natural but she has made very few real friends, her greatest friend is the Khasi girl in Shillong.*

*We were in hysterics over Davids party and its aftermath, I must say he might have warned you all to wear old clothes.<sup>255</sup> Granny is obviously revelling in the lurid telephone calls, rude postcards etc that have followed! You'll have almost forgotten it by now, back in the old Oxford rut, don't forget to let us know if you can find a bed for Fiona – hope you'll be able to come & meet us, I'll let you know arrival times. We shall presumably go to R & A's for a few hours anyway, & take the night train north. I'll write again from Aden & Port Said and try to collect plots for short stories – always a mass of them on board. You must expect a mass of rejection slips, too, couldn't have more than me, it's the time I've wasted on writing that gets me down but hope will keep springing eternal. I don't know if you can read any of this.*

*Much love – only 3 weeks! Mummy*

Iris left Cherideo with Fiona and Anne on 5th May and sailed from Bombay on P. & O. "Canton" on 9th May. She wrote several letters to my father on the way back to England.

Iris to Donald, Ambassador Hotel, Bombay 7th May 1962

*My Darling,*

*Well here we are by the skin of our teeth - having tea in the lobby of the hotel before tottering down the road to the Cinema. We got here at 1a.m. after a terrible flight - we're nervous wrecks and it's had the effect of making me want to sleep all the time! We taxied off for take off; and after some preliminary roars we went back to the airport where they explained there was a technical hitch and kept us sitting panting in a boiling hot cabin while the pilots put their heads together. After ten minutes they decided to go, but wrongly as it turned out as after some bad weather, about 1½ hours from Bombay, there was a peculiar*

noise, a lurch, and one of the engines stopped. The lights went up for us to put on our safety belts, several people shouted, "We're on fire" and the Air Hostesses skuttled to the back and fell on their knees, I thought they were praying but we all felt past prayer or hope - After what seemed to be several hours, enlivened by remarks like "My god I smell burning" the pilot came through to tell us that number 3 engine was overheating and he had switched it off and there was nothing to worry about. But we were kept strapped in and though the Air Hostesses kept telling us not to worry, when we caught them off guard they had their heads in their hands and looked most depressed! It was the longest hour I've ever spent but we made a perfect landing dead on time so there probably wasnt anything to worry about, but you know me, I'm not happy when all four engines are going but on three! To round off my fateful journey, the taxi we were in this morning hit another one and the drivers started hitting each other in the middle of a busy crossroads while a crowd collected and we sat hot and embarrassed and being tooted at madly/ Also the Company or Kilburns had only booked us her for one night, and had specifically said I was to pay the bill - So I had to trek round to Mackinnons this morning to persuade them to pay, luckily the hotel was able to give us another room (not air-conditioned) so we are all right. You might ask Leslie<sup>256</sup> though why I was supposed to foot the bill. I saw the letter to the hotel and it specially made a point of that and they wouldn't take my word for it. Anyway darling, dont worry, its all making a good story, it only needs the boat to sink to round it off!

Bombay isn't as hot as Calcutta, we don't sail till 9th but get on the boat to-morrow evening, will vacate our rooms early though to save an extra day. This is a lovely hotel, v. good food and lots of fascinating Yanks! I'm sending herewith our excess baggage tickets, also I dont [part missing]

Next morning. A very exciting film, 'The Naked Edge', which Fiona spent most of under the seat, and a good night though hot. Now we are debating what to do to-day. Shall probably go to the pool as the coolest place. My next letter will be from Aden in about a week, dont worry about us darling, and look after yourself - we miss you lots and lots and it wont be long before we're all together under the yew tree. Dont let Them depress you too much and keep loving me.

Love you lots, always - Iris

Iris to Donald, P&O Orient Lines, Indian Ocean, Saturday 12th May 1962

My darling,

Can't believe that it's just a week since we left, feel we've been skimming over this sea forever. Very smooth and warm it is, with lots of porpoises. I'm sitting on deck after lunch, the cabin is stuffy and if I sleep I wake up with a headache. But to put your mind at rest, I enjoying the trip very much, the cabin is on T deck but quite big with a porthole and we share it with a nice Anglo-Indian girl who is going to join her husband. There are many more Europeans, though most of them are rather odd, however in the customs shed I met an old Naini girl friend - Betty Harris - her brother was in the police and a vague boy friend of mine. She is married to a policeman, a rather dull little man who twitched but it's quite fun talking about the Old Days - she goes back to Naini every year. There's another nice couple called Grant, he was a tea planter for a bit, but I think they're on the verge of getting a divorce - anyway we have the odd drinks together and I'm changing to their table to-morrow, at the moment Anne and I are 1st sitting with an awful hard-bitten Australian spinster who is terribly rude to the steward, and Fiona is 2nd sitting with a mother and daughter. There are dozens of girls aboard to Fiona's horror, but she has joined a gang of them and they have parties with engineers in their cabins but I suppose theres safety in numbers! We eat lots of kippers and cheese and I have a pint of beer morning and evening - 1/4d!

*Anne and I work for 2 hours in the morning but its very distracting and I hope we aren't ruining her chances, we dont seem to be able to get much done. We spent the 2nd day at Bombay at Breach Candy<sup>257</sup> and got burnt to cinders. Mackinnons did absolutely nothing for me, wouldn't even cash a cheque of Rs 30, gave me no help or information, everybody I've spoken to has the same complaint. Still we had no trouble embarking, it will be very hot after to-morrow but we have blowers in the cabins. We're all brown and well but wish you could be here to enjoy the beer darling, wish you were here for other reasons asa well of course! We think of you often and do hope all the animals are well and the tea and you aren't getting too depressed darling - love you so much and wish you were here - Hugs and xxxx - Totty*

Iris to Alan, Saturday 12th May 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*I feel like a travel poster, lounging on deck with a glittering sea in front & white clad figures gliding about with iced drinks on trays – lovely & luxurious for a short while though it would pall after too long. I feel we've been travelling for months though we set off a week to-day. We spent a night & day at Dum Dum Air Port & took the evening Viscount across to Bombay.*

*After what they called a "technical hitch" delaying our take-off, we had a ghastly flight culminating in one of the engines packing up. Several people said we were on fire and we were told to fasten our safety belts – the next 2 hours were the longest of my life but we made a perfect landing – what a wonderful moment when we touched down, how I wish we hadn't got to fly again!*

*Bombay was quite fun, shops, an air-conditioned cinema and a day at a lovely swimming pool where we got burnt to cinders, and so far the boat trip has been very pleasant. Our cabin is right down as far as it can be and very hot but theres a nice little pool and we are revelling in cheese & kippers & beer & smoking far too much with cigarettes 1/1 for 20.*

*Fiona found there were masses of girls on board to her horror but seems to have staked a claim to the 2nd engineer or some such.*

*Anne & I find it very hard to concentrate on Charles I but are making a brave effort to work for 2 hours a day. A very mixed lot, quite a few Europeans but many of them with Chinese wives, lots and lots of fascinating little Chinese girls and a vast crowd of ships bores who tell endless stories about their travels – why are other people's travels so boring & one's own so fascinating? Aden to-morrow & after that it'll be fiery hot for a few days but the Mediterranean should be lovely. Will write again from Port Said & should know time of arrival by then.*

*... Hope all goes well with you. Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Donald, Canton c.18th May 1962

*My darling*

*A letter from you at Suez, which cheered us up and I'm glad you are finding the time passing quickly and that the loggies etc. are well., hope it will continue that way. Also that you won't get involved in any of the labour disputes, had a beer this morning with a young planter (the only one on the boat thank heavens) who knows everyone, including Dorothy Lyndow! - he is taking the Woodhouses bull terrier as I gather they have packed up. There's also someone Mackenzie on the 1st Class who knew Gussel Brown in the Gurkhas and wants to be remembered to him.*

*We're still having a lovely trip, the Ted Sea was like the Mediterranean and at one stage we were wearing jerseys! Now we're in the Suez Canal and theres a wonderful breeze even*

*though at the moment we're stationary in one of the bitter lakes. The sea is bright green and all those sea hawks we photographed are swooping over it and we're surrounded by our convoy of ships of all kinds. There is a lot of work going on all along the canal, widening it. Aden was quite hot but we got off and tramped about trying on bikinis - at least waiting in sinister little back rooms while Fiona did. She eventually got one which she wears in absolute agony, clutching a towel to herself every time a man approaches! She is having a fairly hectic romance with a chief engineer - not of this ship, he is going back to a shore job in Hong Kong. He is a nice lad, but 31 with a rather broad accent. I don't think it'll last beyond the boat, tho' she seems keener on him than anyone else she's ever met - but I expect its just the lovely moonlight nights! Everyone on this boat is so friendly, last night we were in a group with the head chef, a bar steward and the chief engineer, and on two occasions have been down to listen to records in cabins, once an officer, once one of the crew. I've never been on a boat like it, but this is her one but last voyage before being taken to Hong Kong to be broken up. I now sit at a table with the Grants who are an awfully nice couple - she is terribly attractive and most amusing, we giggle incessantly, but she seems a bit nervy and something not quite right between them. I don't know how much Annie is enjoying herself, she enjoyed the dance the other evening, had a couple of beers and all the young officers danced with her - the band consists of 3 old old men who spend the entire day drinking in a corner of the lounge and stagger out for an hour or two in the evening to saw their way hazily through 1920 tunes.*

*We arrive early on the morning of the 26th so I think I'll go straight to Robert's flat and take the night train up to the Lakes, Fiona will come with us I think and get reorganised. Roberts book on the H. of Commons has been awarded a prize for the best literary work by a writer under 30, and is selling 1000 copies a month - amazing! Have had 2 letters from Alan, bless him, yours at Aden missed us but will eventually catch us up. Two of the girls that Fiona is friendly with turn out to be ex-students of Charlotte Mason College<sup>258</sup> and taught her and Anne! I meet my old Naini friend most days for a beer before lunch, we work till 12 but find it very hard to get down to it in the afternoons. I swim in the evening at about 6 and have another beer before dinner, nearly everyone on the ship seems to have got a sore throat or tummy or both, so I hope we dont collapse at the last moment. Must write to Alan now darling and get them both off, not sure when we get to Port Said.*

*Take great care of yourself and don't get too depressed, we'll all be gathered round that little old Telly in no time at all.*

*We all love you lots and lots and think about you all the time.*

*Always my darling, Totty*

Iris to Alan, S.S. Canton 18 May 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*Another letter from you at Suez - kind boy - we loved getting it. We reached there last night & are now half way up the canal & due at Port Said this evening. This bit's always fun with the camels & all, they are cutting & threshing their wheat on the banks & looking very biblical (not the camels!)*

*The Red Sea was as cool as could be, and theres still a lovely breeze - can help feeling we're in for mountainous seas in the channel to make up for all this. Aden was fairly hot & we spent our time tramping round trying on bikinis - at least waiting while Fiona did - she finally got one which she has only worn gingerly in dark corners since! She's having a fairly hectic romance with a chief engineer (not of this ship) but I expect the English breezes will Cool it off - moonlight on tropical water is very heady but unrealistic. I don't know if Anne*

is enjoying herself, as usual there is nobody of her age & its lonely for her but still not a bad experience.

Her work is not going very well, I Hope the last month in England will make up for lost ground, simply can't concentrate here, & it seems wicked to sit shut in a stuffy cabin all day.

Two of the girls on the boat turn out to be ex Charlotte Mason Coll. students who taught the girls! As usual there are some odd people about, moaning Americans on world tours who can't think why the rest of the world isn't exactly like Oklahoma (why did they leave it then?): fat, hearty men who roar with laughter in the verandah Cafe from dawn to dusk; a Franciscan Father who chain smokes and is mad keen on cooking & knows one hundred ways of dealing with eggs; & a head dining room steward who's like a 4th rate variety turn, tells long funny (?) stories & burst into song & dance routines to go with them – he looks about 70 & I'm sure is senile. He went up to the 4 nuns at the next table yesterday & said "Well, my dears, have you heard that one about when old man Pope died & went to 'even'?! The nuns never blinked an eyelash as he went on with an appalling story all about the Pope & the Guv'nor and the Guv's son – I nearly swooned though!

We get to London the morning of the 26th, but I don't know how long we shall be disembarking – so if you can meet us come to Roberts flat where we shall eventually fetch up.

Fiona now feels she will have no clothes & would rather leave Oxford till later – so unless you've made hard & fast arrangements we'll all go up to the lakes together that night. Sorry to keep changing, things look different now from Assam & we're all going to be disorientated for a week or two. Anyway give Robert a telephone number where I can reach you at about tea time on 26th if for any reason you can't get to London. I must talk to you at least.

I feel I've had too much sun to-day & am coming over hot & cold so had better lie down in my cabin with a damp cloth. Will write again from Malta in three days – Can't wait to see you,

All love - Mummy

Iris to Donald, S.S. Canton English Channel May 25th 1962

Darling - England in sight - wonderful - and the good weather has held, it's as smooth as milk. So was the Bay of Biscay yesterday, we just couldn't have had a better trip. It's a bit chilly though, I'm sitting in my cabin writing this, with my feet on the radiator, wish I had a hot bottle. We shall all be glad to land, its been a very happy voyage but boredom begins to set in with the cold weather when the lounges are full and there's nothing to do but drink. I don't know if you got my letter - from Malta. I wrote it, and then dropped it so I hoped someone would post it. We enjoyed our three hours there, but wished it had been longer, we walked, and drove in a horse and cart and looked at a beautiful old Cathedral (but as the girls were wearing jeans we were thrown out rather rapidly) and went to a rather seedy Café and played a juke box to recover our nerve. It's a fascinating place, full of old forts and narrow streets and flights of stairs and the climate blissful, the first really cool air we'd had. We passed Gibraltar at sunset, very beautiful, and have had no excitements since except for the Gala Dance when we all had to dress up at gipsys - by the time I'd got the girls into their scarves and ear-rings I was too exhausted to do anything about myself but the Grants ordered two bottles of wine at dinner so we had a fairly hilarious evening and ended up in the chief engineers cabin eating strawberries. Fiona's romance seems to have petered out, which is just as well, he wasn't really her type at all, I don't know how sorry she is about it. We have £19 of our money left, so after tips should have plenty to get us to the Lake District, I wonder if you've done anything about getting some transferred, - I'll write to Grindlays, I think. Hope all is well with you darling, not long now, we miss you so much - hugs and kisses - Totty. [On the back: "Home and Safe!" and posted at Ambleside Westmorland 28 May]



Iris to Donald, 5th June 1962 from Field Head, Hawkshead

*My Darling -*

*Letters from you for Anne and I to-day, just when we thought you'd forgotten us. Glad all is well, and you're having lots to keep you busy. We're having the most blissful weather just now. I'm lying on the back lawn with birds singing, sun blazing. Anne and I have been working out here all morning, and now she has gone to watch racing for a bit - she is very good, wakes me up with a breakfast tray at 7.30 and then does revision on her own till I've finished chores at 9.30. Her birthday was a beautiful day but we didn't do much...Fiona goes off each morning on the 8a.m. bus to work for her grocer, she enjoys it, the work consists of getting boxfulls of orders ready to be delivered and she catches the 2.15 bus back and goes out sketching in the afternoon. No pay as yet, but we're waiting breathlessly. She has gone to have her hair dyed red this afternoon so expect the worst. She's heard from John Lampett who is coming to stay about July 4th - Anne and I are going down to London on June 13th for her French oral, write to us there at 174, Old Brompton Rd., S.W.5<sup>259</sup> until June 28th. I shall be a new woman when this exam is over, I'm sure that's why I feel so tired. Got all the dope from the Company about help with school fees but will go and see them when I'm in London to find out exactly what "school" means. Thank you for the £75 darling, I had £50 sent have to get an outfit each as it's Emma's<sup>260</sup> christening on Sunday - I'm godmother so alas a present must be forthcoming too. I'm p.g-ing with M. for this two weeks, so that won't leave much but you say you've sent another £75. Will send a detailed expense sheet in my next. Martins Bank is v. kind and obliging. Grindlay payed 2 lots of rent this month and I gave Alan some. Hope this doesn't depress you and send you hurtling for the gin bottle?! Goodness its hot, it must be 80°. We've been watching Test Match and World Cup football. Wish you were here darling - all love, Totty.*

Iris to Donald, 14th June 1962, 174, Old Brompton Rd., S.W.5.

*My darling -*

*Two letters and a telegram to greet us when we arrived here yesterday evening - very welcome as we were weary after our bus trip - we had a puncture at Warrington and spent 2 hours there getting it fixed! We left the house in the rain feeling squeamish and depressed, but a nights sleep has restored us somewhat. The sad thing is we came down 2 days early to see "Twelfth Night" which was supposed to be on to-day but it isn't - anyway we went to see "South Pacific" instead to cheer Anne up. Her French Oral is the day after to-morrow, doubt if she'll pass that as she won't even attempt the proper accent with me, I don't think it matters vastly. We're living on bread and cheese and milk, so simple and I hope we shan't spend too much here. We've been busy mastering all the gas gadgets which have weird and individual ways of lighting, have been sitting on the Commode for the last half hour trying to come to terms with the bathroom geyser which hissed venomously and spat cold water at us from odd places and finally lit with a gigantic roar - which was all pose because we still haven't got any hot water. I shall be glad to have this exam over, am going to buy a little bottle of brandy for Anne and I to drink outside the Hammersmith Town Hall - can you think of a drearier setting? R & A and the family will be returning on Tuesday which will make it a bit difficult for us to work. I'm going to see the Assam Co. one day to look into this school assistance business and get them to sign the huge form I've got to fill in for Fiona. I'm afraid Anne won't be here to meet you darling as there's a French girl coming from July 1st. If John Lampett can bring one of us down after his stay we might fix it that way. Will ring up the bank ow and find if the money has come, I expect it will have by now. Dont get too depressed will you, not*

*long at all now and J.S. and his thugs will seem figments of a bad dream. Fiona is hurt Terry hasn't written!*

*All love darling-heart, Totty.*

Iris to Donald, London, Wednesday 20th June 1962

*My darling,*

*The eve of the exam and Angela and Robert due to return in a couple of hours so the picnic is over. Anne and I have enjoyed our week her, we've worked quite hard and been to see several films to take our mind off it and stared into endless shop windows and had our hair done - tried not to spend too much but London is hard to be economical in. The worst day was Friday when Anne took her French Oral. I decided to go to the bank on the way but of course it wasn't, and we didn't help by taking a bus going in the wrong direction. We panted in to Grindlays just as they were clanging the iron gates to, but they let us through and as we were near Westminster Abbey we thought we'd "do" that before going to London University. By the time that was over my feet were white hot and we found the university was at least a mile from the nearest Tube station (we'd lost confidence in buses by then) so finally hobbled in with every nerve and vein in my legs clanging and clogged. Anyway we didn't have to wait which was a good thing as it was a huge forbidding hall full of quivering figures like us, Anne seemed quite cheerful afterwards though she said she talked Urdu a lot of the time. Afterwards we tottered into a hairdresser and Anne emerged looking stunning, she has been trying to keep it the same but without success poor darling in spite of going round in a purple hair net.*

*Yesterday I went to see Houldey about education grants, he wasn't very effusive in his welcome and after much vague talk he told me to write a letter which he would put in front of the board on Tuesday and ring me up afterwards to let me know what they said. I wanted to know if I would get the grant towards a hostel if Anne did a training at a daily school or technical college, as usual we were the first people to bring this up and he talked a lot about "test cases" and rather outside the scope of the "arrangement" but he was quite nice about it really and said he would put in a word on our behalf. He was terrible busy because he was spending the rest of the week at Ascot and had to look out his grey topper and so on! He had some lovely relics dug up at Cherideo is a glass case, falling to pieces and he didn't know what they were, I hinted strongly that he give them to me but by then it was time for his tea. I also took along this pink form but he didn't know what your salary was and so here it is, to be filled in and signed by the G.M. please, and you can bring it back with you. Its for Fiona.*

*The evening before we saw the film of "West Side Story" which was simply terrific, the best dancing I've ever seen. I've booked seats for the Antony Newley play<sup>261</sup> on Saturday as a special treat for Anne, and old school friend is coming up to meet her and they can go together. That will be our last splash. Alan rang up last night, I'm not going to Oxford after all, travelling is so expensive, he has got a lift up as far as Manchester so I said to leave his heavy trunk and bits and pieces and you would collect them. I can see you leaping out of your seat with horror, but Oxford is not out of your way darling, you dont have to come into London at all, you can drop your man wherever convenient and either take the motor way or just as you feel. I will send a little map in my next letter.*

*Alan is going into digs next term so has to clear all his rubbish out of his rooms, and it'll save an awful lot of money if you can bring it up, otherwise he'd have to go by train. Please dont get het up about it. Alan is going to work in a Borstal home for a week or so in July but I hope he'll cut his hair or he'll be taken for one of the inmates. Got a letter from Fiona today to say she had dropped a tin of sliced peaches on her foot and got blood all over the orders, but in spite of this was being promoted to work behind the counter which will be*

*chaotic I fear. Anne's exam finishes a week to-day and we shall have a couple of days after M and D leave to throw out a few little tables and then John will be arriving and then you. Its no time at all, the girls sandals should be sizes 6 and 6½ I think, anything gaudy will do, with turned up toes if possible. Dont get anything for me darling, I would rather have something here, truly. I wont get you a jersey either, you can choose one for yourself. If you send money at the beginning of July and get your pay that month that should be plenty.*

*R & A will be arriving soon and I must get tea ready - have been boiling a rabbit this morning to get its bones for us to study, but rather over-did it so they are slightly melted - but we have some nice soup.*

*Please thank the cook for his letter, hope you'll find something for him to do? Hope the dogs will be all right and Boots, give him and Miranda into Ghansi's care - Anna to the Edyes and Candy to Lavender.*

*By the time you get this there'll be only two weeks to go about!*

*All love darling, look after yourself and dont get arrested!*

*Hugs - Totty.*

Iris to Donald, 25th June 1962, London

*Darling - Further to my letter of a few days ago - have just got one from you saying you want Anne to bring money etc. to the Airport. But as I explained before, Anne isn't staying in London after all as Angela has a French girl coming. So have you Rs 75 changed on the plane so that you will have that much for petrol at least. Couldn't you sent a cheque to the car people? Anyway they'd probably let you have some. John Lampitt might be able to drive one of us down to London, but can't count on it. I'll send a map in my next letter of how to get to Oxford and on, it is very easy, I don't even know your flight number, time of arrival - anything? The time has gone so quickly, it has suddenly struck me that you'll be here in a fortnight and no time to exchange letters. We're in the thick of the exam now, Anne has been quite calm about it to date but is getting worked up about the Biology to-morrow and is in a daze of tiredness and crossness this evening. She and Lucy<sup>262</sup> and I walked to the Natural History Museum this afternoon where she looked at skeletons and Lucy rushed from one glass case to another shrieking like several express trains. I am getting tired of London - at least of pavements, tubes, and spending money, I go to the Hammersmith town hall with Anne and sit and read which she and 300 other wretched creatures do their paper - actually it is a nice place with a garden and benches and pigeons and one of the other mothers is usually here so we exchange lies about our brilliant children.*

*Am going down to Julia's for a couple of days after this and home on the 30th - thank goodness, am longing to be back with this ordeal over. You will send the money on the first week of July wont you darling? I'm quite worn out to-night, I'll write again in a couple of days plus a map, but don't flap if you have a few pounds for petrol thats all you'll need. Love you lots darling - Totty*

Iris to Donald, Hawkshead 307, Field Head.

*My darling -*

*I hope this will get you before you leave - no Air Letters in Hawkshead P.O.! I still don't know your flight number, time or even day of arrival but presume you've tole me. John Lampett isn't now coming till after you get here - so I'm afraid nobody will be there to meet you darling but I'll send the A.A. map and a few pounds to the Air India Bureau, but hang onto all the money you can so you won't be stuck if anything goes wrong. Could you please*

*pick up Alan's cases at Oxford, he'll let the man and Worcester Coll. know you're coming, you can skirt London and it shouldn't take you out of your way.*

*Home at last, after a hectic 2 days with Julia and Billy. They have a divine house which they have done up to look like something out of Homes & Gardens, the children are very attractive and amusing. BUT they all shriek incessantly and Julia is a jangling mass of nerves and I reacted by getting a migraine and spending most of the time in bed! We came back by bus and after one day together M & D left this morning and we've had a gigantic tidy up, the top landing is impassable with the chest of drawers we've chucked out but we don't know what to do with them next - would like to light a huge fire under them!*

*Anne finished her exams quite cheerfully and now we're forgetting the whole thing till the results come in. Its the most peculiar feeling not having work to do, nice but a bit sad too. Alan and Fiona are cheerful, they've gone off to a "social" with a Swedish girl Fiona has palled up with, Alan's hair slightly less frightful. He goes off to his Borstal camp on Saturday for 2 weeks but after that will be home for good.*

*I do hope you will get away without any last minute troubles darling - tell Alastair<sup>263</sup> if there is any trouble with the dogs to get in touch with Nita, Candy for Lavender - Anna for Celia! Have a good trip and hurry home my darling, the Aga is waiting to be riddled, lawns cut, walls painted - and I'm waiting too -*

*All love till then - Totty*

My father left Assam on leave 12th July, and after spending most of the summer at Field Head, both parents left by air on 9th October and arrived back at Nazira on 13th October 1962.

The first letter I have from my mother after her return to Cherideo was five days after the Chinese launched their attack against India in the disputed area to the North East of Assam.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo Thursday 25th October 1962

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm sitting on the verandah sipping fresh orange juice with the sun blazing down, lawn mower rattling, ferns rustling in a soft breeze and the bathroom being painted – so you can see am feeling less miserable and frustrated than the last time I wrote. This in spite of the fact that the Chinese are breathing down our necks and the Russians are steaming towards Cuba. Living permanently on the edge of a crisis certainly makes one live more awarely, looking ones last on all things lovely literally every hour. I don't know what the Chinese are up to but you needn't worry about us, as we can always slip up into the Naga hills and be in Burma in a few days. We haven't had a word from you since we left, but I think the mails are probably being confused by the state of emergency and likely to be held up.*

*I don't know what Anne is up to now, Fiona has made contact with Rupert and Alan Barnes, don't know that I'm thrilled about the latter but she is too busy with work and coffee bars to have much time for gadding anyway.*

*Life here has settled down into a very busy nothingness, I'm quite unwound and potter round in a tranquil daze doing a million unimportant things like fleaing dogs, digging, shouting at malis, Shorthand and drawing. I do mean to get down to something more definite, for one thing this sort of existence doesn't tire me out at all and I can sleep properly. I'm going to start working a bit in the school and hospital next week, I'm going to see if I can't make any headway with the labour force and family planning, whenever we try to think of ways of coping with poverty, unemployment etc we always come back to this hopeless situation of a vast new number of mouths to be filled. Even if I could persuade two or three*

people a month not to have any more children it would save a little bit of suffering, and the idea might catch on. It seems a good starting point anyway.

I'm going to write to Robert Shaw for his books on the Moguls too to make a study of them but whether I shall write anything about them I don't know. I find it such a relief not writing, and want to hand my enthusiasm and ambitions on to you. Perhaps that's just the effect of all this sleepy sunshine, an interesting subject for a book or thesis would be the effect of climate on religion and philosophy, though I'm sure it must have been done already.

When I sit out in the garden after lunch and nothing happens except the thud of the leaves falling from the rubber tree I truly believe with the Hindus that time is naught and life an illusion, and can't wait to become a dewdrop in the shining sea! I can never make up my mind whether drifting acceptance is laziness or tolerance, it is so easy to be tolerant and yet it's amazing how difficult most people find it.

We went to the service at the club last Sunday where there was quite a good turnout which was nice for the padre. He is a well-meaning man but seems to have fixed planter's mentality at the average age of ten and gave us a very simple little chat about religion being more than just a set of rules and prayer being more than just asking for what we wanted. Anyway he meant well, and where's that tolerance of mine.

Afterwards we went up the river and had a picnic lunch with the Pooles, didn't swim but just sat at the caravan site talking about our families, it was beautiful of course and this Sunday Daddy and I are going to take a boat and do a little fishing and drawing. I feel I shall be quite contented as long as I don't have to see anyone but I suppose that's too much to hope.

I often think of you in your room, eating your calories (I hope) and living in the past. I hope the work is going well & not too many depressing moods bothering you. Hope the grant comes through too, let us know. Much love from us both, Mummy

Iris to her mother, Wednesday 31st October 1962.

Darling Mummy,

The post seems to have been opened again after several days of being beleaguered so I hope this will get through. Everything quite chaotic here as you can imagine with wild rumours flying that the Chinese are almost on us, the military have blocked all the main roads and snatch any vehicle they can lay their hands on so we have only once ventured abroad after dark as ours is the only jeep that hasn't been taken. I think things are a little better now though without a wireless we don't really know what is going on but I gather the Chinese haven't got any further, everyone in India is offering their last drop of blood to fight the invader but what they need is weapons which I gather the British government is now supplying!

We got as far as gathering some anti-malaria tablets to take with us into the Naga hills but I believe there is a scheme on to evacuate women if necessary, I don't think it will be, the thought of trundling down to Calcutta in another ropey old Dakota worries me more than the Chinese!

I had Daphne and Babs Meredith over for the day on Monday and they were in a fearful state of panic and planning to try and get away by train with dogs, mothers etc. Of course we all feel Mrs Munsey is the last person to worry about but can hardly say so. ....

We, or rather I, went to the club with them and saw an appalling film and met everyone, including the Edyes, Celia is still not well apparently but looks fine, Tim is the one who seems to be pale and wrought. We're making moves to buy a car with the little money we have in our despot [deposit] fund but are in no particular hurry.

*Talking of money, Mac has sent £15 and some more is following. Unless you have already done so, please don't pay the bills after all, I've told the bank to put the £15 into your account and I'd be grateful if you would send £8 to Pat for the Speedwriting course and something to Anne for pocket money, it's difficult to know what she needs as I don't know whether she has job or not. The last I heard she was very cheerful which is the main thing. I will send cheques to John Wright and Woodburn and Clayton<sup>264</sup> and the Electricity people, probably all together in a letter to you to save postage, if you wouldn't mind distributing them.*

*Haven't heard from Alan at all which seems odd but with the present state of affairs not surprising. We've had two days of rain and it's still overcast so we're having the chimney swept and hope to have a fire this evening, couldn't believe I could be looking forward to a fire again so soon. Mac's birthday to-day, he was pleased to get your letter, I don't know what happened to the bottle of whisky, we didn't touch it but it must have been sucked into the party. I'll write to Thompson's to replace it. I'm sending boxes of tea as Xmas presents to all and sundry, I expect they think this a cheap way out but it actually costs Rs 10 a box in postage. I only mention this as only Julia bothers to acknowledge the tea, presumably because they all think it's free... Nothing in the way of news, I dress make and garden and work for hours every day on the dogs who are looking a bit better but still pretty scruffy. The compound is slowly emerging from the jungle again and when I can get the grass cut it'll make a big improvement.*

*Much love to you both – Iris*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo Nov. 6th 1962*

*My dear Alan,*

*Two letters from you, thank you very much, as I thought they were obviously being collected in heaps and have been pouring in for the last couple of days. Sorry to hear of your cold and struggles with your landlady,<sup>265</sup> perhaps it would be better to try and find somewhere else next term? Doesn't she expect you to eat or what? Fiona loved her day in Oxford and I can imagine how ravishing it must have looked during that wonderful weather, it was nice to hear she was looking well as Granny said she was "desperately tired" and doing far too much – she probably is but will organise her life gradually and is obviously loving exhausting herself.*

*We have had our ups and downs here as you can imagine, there were a few days of chaos with no papers, no news (our wireless broke down) and wild rumours flying that they were almost on us – I packed a little bag and looked up the route to the nearest Naga village but things are a little better now... Whatever does happen, please don't worry about us, even if you hear nothing we shall be all right. In the (unlikely) event of us not being able to contact you, the company can always be approached for funds; their address is 5, Laurence Pountney Hill, London E.C.4. Like you we have been far more worried about Cuba but one is getting used to these crises and taking a terribly fatalistic view I find.*

*In spite of listening for rumble of guns, life has been very peaceful and the weather is perfect, we lighted our first fire on Daddy's birthday and had letters from you all and a whisky peg to make us feel life really worth living, Daddy was very touched by your letter, we keep telling each other what wonderful children we have and think ourselves terribly lucky in spite of no money, binoculars, telephone, lenses etc!.*

*I had Daphne Meredith for the day on Monday, literally grey with worry about her poodle and her mother and was quite worn out trying to cheer her up – we went to the film in Nazira in the evening and I tried to sleep but the cane stuck into the back of my neck – can't even remember the name of the thing but it was terribly awful. I met the Edyes, Rigbys, Barries<sup>266</sup>*



*etc etc all worried about their poodles and horses – not one person has expressed sympathy for the children that will starve and the women who will be raped and killed if 30,000 Chinese over-run Assam, odd isn't it?*

*On Saturday Robert Higham came to supper and on Sunday I just got into my dressing gown when John Lampitt rolled up, he had arrived from home a couple of days previously, and was looking pale and thin already but very cheerful. He is either getting a job with Shell or the United Nations and is torn between money and ideals. I think he has some girl in the background to complicate things. Like you he is obsessed with the population problem but as an agriculturalist thinks of it in terms of how to produce more food. I asked Tom Poole if I could start some family planning work in the hospital and he said the Board were against it and he would have to get their permission first – I feel outraged by this utterly callous attitude and intend to carry on anyway if I don't hear soon. The trouble is that Tom might get into trouble, and Daddy, so where do ones loyalties lie?*

*I have ordered a copy of the "Bhagavad Gita" for you to be sent home, I don't think it'll be very wonderful but the best they have.*

*I'm still not doing anything very constructive I'm afraid. I've been working at my shorthand in case I have to get a job in Calcutta! I wake to the sound of hornbills & my days are threaded through with a pattern of birds, very beautiful & busy & punctual in all their comings & goings:*

*"I have learnt to live each day  
Minute by breathing minute,  
Birds that lightly begin it  
Shadows muting its end."*

*Anne sounds quite happy now, only Granny is cross as she can be & fighting with everyone!  
Much love – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo November 17th 1962*

*My dear Alan,*

*News from the front! A very peaceful front here with only the barking of the dogs to disturb it and the scent of brushes in the drain as the malis clean them. The real front must be a nightmare, so cold and hilly with Chinese peering down and flourishing arms that the Indian troops have none of, or perhaps they have now. It is very touching how the whole country has rallied as one man and the papers are full of stories of pathetic little life's savings being handed in to Mr Nehru, even the Nagas aren't taking advantage of it, a pity this spirit can't carry on after the emergency is over. In his naive way Nehru will soon have Russians and Americans flying side by side!*

*We have only started to feel a slight pinch in that things like eggs and chickens are getting hard to buy and expensive, but we would never starve here with these fish-teeming rivers all round.*

*We went to ours last Sunday with John Lampitt, we started very late so didn't bother to fish but had a nice soothing day sucking up sunshine and oranges. John is more or less engaged to the girl from Durham University, she is taking an M.Litt. by writing a thesis on "Communal Meals in the Early Church" which sounds fun. I think he's wise not to bring her to Assam though!*

*On Saturday evening he drove us to the new Sonari Club to see the film which needless to say hadn't arrived and we spent a very boring evening lolling against the bar, every club seems as dull as every other nowadays. We had been into B.B. tennis that afternoon (simply*

*because the Simpsons sent a car for us) and my throat was aching with suppressed yawns for hours on end. When we got back from the river we found the Head Clerk had found us a car, a black Ambassador in reasonable condition and costing exactly what we had in the depreciation fund, so we bought it and Daddy is having fun playing with it, doubt if we shall actually use it much but we are now entitled to draw a car allowance which just about feeds us for a month!*

*I have been given the all clear to start my family planning campaign so am putting out some propaganda and hope the candidates come rolling in. Otherwise I'm still not doing anything very useful, gardening from 6.30 in the morning till breakfast time and again from 3 till it gets dark and in between polishing up my Shorthand and Typing (which seems to get worse, I'm sure it's the result of those awful little homilies in the Manual). The atmosphere is not conducive to settled activity, one just has to take each day and live it – one of those corny generalisations you will spring on!*

*I do hope Penny is getting on all right with her exams, I was wondering if you would like to make your Christmas Ball into your birthday treat, perhaps Fiona and Rupert come for it and we could pay for the tickets? There isn't anyone really very exciting in the Lake District to make a party with, but you might want to have Penny to yourself or have made other arrangements. If you do think it's a good idea get the tickets and let me know what they cost...*

*I was wondering if you couldn't write to Victor Gollanz and see if he could find you something useful to do within the scope of your talents which are obviously literary or does that sound a dotty idea? I wish we could have another talk, already I'm beginning to feel out of touch with you & your work, these silly little forms are useless. My reading is still "The Golden Bough" it's surprising how little I do too, it's always a mystery to me where time goes out here. Quite a lot on the dogs who are looking much better for the attention.*

*Hope your food problems are solved, I constantly wonder what the 3 of you are eating, Leek soup I suppose?! Much love, Mummy*

My mother wrote again four days later, as the political situation worsened.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo Nov. 21st [Wednesday] [It is date stamped 23rd November 1962 and addressed on the back ARRIVED IN CALCUTTA]

*My dear Alan,*

*I don't know whether this letter will get to you but I'm hoping it may just. I'm afraid this is it and there is no holding the Chinese now, it is all terribly tragic and senseless, the casualties on both sides are phenomenal and one is riven with pity for poor Assam and what it is going to mean in terms of starving children. I think that by the time this gets to you (if it does) we shall be out, probably in which case I'll send you a wire from Calcutta or Singapore or wherever we land up. In any event don't worry because even wires will probably not arrive. I have a suitcase packed but of course we may not even be able to take that much, in which case have some woolly vests ready for me! It is very peculiar sitting on a peaceful sunny verandah eating breakfast and listening to the news telling one about oneself, it all seems quite unreal.*

*Yesterday there was the first big polo do at Nazira and an air of slightly hysterical gaiety, very typical we thought of the British to go down with his polo topee on. John Lampitt had rather a nasty fall and got his head kicked by his horse but seemed to be quite conscious after it. We had the Edyes staying for the week end and had planned to go up the river on Sunday, but Celia had just had another mild heart attack or whatever it is she gets, anyway we didn't think it advisable to take her up and down rapids and so stayed at home. She wasn't looking*

*at all well, neither was Tim, it's a pity she didn't get away before all this happened. Now I wonder if I shall see the river again, this sort of thing has happened to so many millions of people but one never realises at all what it involves. Perhaps it's a good way of getting ones values straight.*

*Yesterday I went over to Suntok to collect Betty Ross's sewing machine and have my hair cut, she and Ruaridh left by car yesterday to motor all the way to Calcutta, it was very bad luck they couldn't have got away on their leave a week ago. I hope they will make it, I suppose a million others will be having the same idea.*

*Apart from the last couple of days my life has been going exactly the same, gardening and trying (with no success as you see) to get my typing to the stage where I will be employable. The trouble is I can't concentrate, my mind is miles ahead of my hands, I console myself that only very stupid slow-moving brains make for good typists! The garden is growing madly and I've nearly finished getting all the flowers out, am not particularly amused at the thought of some Chinese general enjoying it! We had a lovely dollop of rain yesterday, just what we needed. I wish they could have cut the rice and got it out of the way but it's late this year, normally quite a lot of it is cut by now.*

*We got a letter from you and Anne this week, but nothing from Fiona, I expect it's just that she didn't send it. Don't forget to go to the Board for money if you need it as you will during the holidays, if I go to Calcutta I shall be able to send you some from there, I shall stay there for a bit if I can to see what happens and to try and keep in touch with Daddy.*

*Don't let any of this divert you from your work which is the only important thing and your worrying about us won't make an atom of difference except to yourself. I want to write to the girls now, so will stop, love to Penny, do hope the exam is safely over. I expect we shall be seeing you all for Christmas, that would be a lovely thought.*

*When does your term end? Much love from us both – Mummy*

Iris to Donald, [pencil, no date but must be Friday 23rd November]

*Darling,*

*We're off in 40 minutes they say, so will be safely in Calcutta when this arrives. I had a wonderful sleep on the floor with my 2 chickens running round the room by the morning! Hundreds of tired mothers & children here, I feel so sorry for them. Hope Nehru will climb down and we shall be back in a few days darling, am sending back the Marmite in case you have to take to the hills but I'm sure we won't, only wish I needn't go either, it all seems so silly. I've taken a tranquilliser and feel fine, thinking of you and see you soon darling*

*Totty*

Iris to Donald, [pencil, undated: probably Saturday 24th November, from 7, Alipore Rd, Calcutta]

*[OBEROI GRAND notepaper]*

*My darling -*

*Well here we are, ensconced in a vast marble chummary (without any chums alas!) with our ears glued to a wireless that only comes to life when describing the South Dorset by-elections. Alastair<sup>267</sup> will have described the chaos of the Guest House, though everyone did their best for us and most people behaved very well, Josie being the notable exception. When the plane finally arrived she was bundled in with the baggage - an understandable mistake! The worst moment for me as you can imagine was when we were strapping ourselves in with every woman and child howling, the plane was half full of what appeared to be Kyahs<sup>268</sup> wives, all behaving abominably and loaded with gold that might have gone to the brave*

*jawns*<sup>269</sup>. The R.A.F. were wonderful and much better at steering round the horrid corkscrew clouds than Indian pilots As we weren't allowed to fly over Pakistan we got the most wonderful view of Mt. Everest in a blaze of sunshine. When we got to Dum Dum we were amazed to find things were organised at last, tea and sandwiches at every point though we did feel like an African slave market, sitting on benched and waiting to be "distributed" - Liz and Lavender and Prim and I are together and very comfortable. Kilburns<sup>270</sup> have been very good and have laid a car on for us, yesterday morning I went to the Bank and fixed for £75 to be sent home on Dec. 1st and the rest at the beginning of Jan. so don't worry about that. I shall start looking for jobs soon, but we're still hoping we shall be back very soon. I weighed myself yesterday and a card was spat out saying I was 6 stone 8lbs - so prepare to meet a skeleton! We went to the Grand Hotel after lunch and met the Rosses who had come down by train and were very fit and cheerful although in a state of utter confusion with all their belongings strewn round until the bus was at the door. I gave them letters for home so they will get them to-day. Also saw Phyllis White<sup>271</sup> who is staying indefinitely in the Grand, going without breakfast to save the Company money! We're going to try to contact Daphne and Celia to-day, I sat next to Simon Hill's<sup>272</sup> fiancé on the plane, Such a nice girl, she's also going to get a job here if possible as nobody is paying for her. Celia and various other people turned up with their dogs but weren't allowed to take them. I worry so much about you darling, it must be terribly depressing for you but I'm sure things will ease up and we shall be allowed back soon. If you find Candy too much trouble send her in to Tom<sup>273</sup> to put down, but try to keep the others going. I hope letters will get through. I shall write every day anyway and will stay in Calcutta until you have to leave, if you do. This place belongs to an Indian director of Macleods, one of Macleods men came round yesterday, he has 3 boys at Dollar<sup>274</sup> and his wife has to stay at home with them as he can't afford school fees, its nice to find other Calcutta business men in our boat. The zoo is just down the road so I'll take the children there this morning while Liz has her hair done and dumps her money. L and P spend their time eating of course. I'm loving you lots and longing to be home - keep the flowers watered! All love dearest - Totty.

Iris to Alan: [hand-written from c/o Kilburn, Calcutta, written on Saturday 24th or Sunday 25th November 1962].

*My dear Alan,*

*I hope my series of wires and letters have got through to you and you weren't too worried about us. It all happened so suddenly that we had no time to do anything but throw a few unlikely needs into a case and set off. We (the women and children) had planned to go to Calcutta by road, but when we got to Jorhat we were told that 2 R.A.F. planes were coming to pick us up. The disorganisation was utterly British, we were all penned into one building for 24 hours waiting for the planes which were variously described as Brittanias, Constellations, Dakotas, and helicopters and turned out to be Hastings – it was lucky the Chinese decided to call a halt as otherwise we should have been nicely trapped! It was a very painful business having to leave our husbands and possessions ( the latter didn't bother me a bit actually) but we hope that some way will be found out of the muddle and we'll be able to go back.*

*The Indian army have been magnificent but powerless in the face of the suicide tactics of the Chinese who pick up the weapons of the dead and come on in their thousands, shooting their wounded and prisoners. Quite what the object of it all is it's hard to say, once they've eaten the rice and tea and oil will be of little use to them apparently as the problems of transport will be too great.*

*We weren't allowed to fly over Pakistan so went round along the Himalayas and got the most magnificent view of Mt Everest in blazing sunshine. When we arrived there was some sign of organisation at last, cups of tea at every point and we felt as if we'd been fighting on the front ourselves the fuss that was made of us. Liz Leetham with the children, Lavender Corps and her daughter and I have been parked in a vast bungalow with marble floors and have been given a car at our disposal so are quite comfortable but not exactly happy, I don't want to leave India until Daddy does so shall try and get a job here if I find we're not allowed back within a couple of weeks. I know you'll understand my feelings if I'm here I might be allowed back for short periods even, if theres a truce, but once the company takes me home I shall be completely out of touch and probably not allowed back at all.*

*I've sent £75 for December, I shall have it put into your account and will let you know more about the money side in another letter. Much love, keep working –Mummy*

Iris to Donald, Kilburn & Co. 4, Fairlie Place [no date Monday 26 Nov]

*My darling,*

*Just finished listening to the morning news. I always imagine you sitting by the wireless too and its nice to know exactly what you're doing. It sounds a bit more hopeful now that America is really getting organised perhaps the Chinese will ease out. Nothing much has changed here, yesterday morning we went round to see Daphne, her mother fell and broke her leg and is now in Woodlands at Rs50 a day and will be there for a month at least with operation fees etc. Poor John, don't mention this to him as Daphne hasn't told him yet. She was quite cheerful, she's hiding with a friend from Naini days who says she can stay on so she's lucky that way. They're doubtful whether Mrs Munsey<sup>275</sup> will survive the operation, which would be the best thing that could happen. Daphne got Fi-fi out in a knitting bag! We're going round this morning to say goodbye to Celia who is off home this evening, a lot of people have gone but I'm not budging for a bit, masses of typing jobs advertised so I can easily find something to do if need be. Liz is very depressed. She seems unable to cope without an ayah and is moaning this morning that the dhobi has lost 2 prs of the children's socks! Lavender and Prim are stuffing themselves and quite cheerful, they're always at the table five minutes before us and one has to be pretty nippy to get anything to eat. I took the kids to the zoo yesterday while they all went to have their hair done, the zoo is very attractive and the birds quite beautiful - 2 lovely hooluk monkeys free in a vast tree hooting away with joy. They had a fearful drama at the hairdresser as Lavender thought Prim was lost and went off to the police, and when Prim appeared they had to set to and find which of the 600 police stations Lavender was in! I don't know what the other Hilda - Tyll<sup>276</sup> - Kathleen<sup>277</sup> - Thelma gang are up to - Kathleen has hardly spoken to me since leaving Nazira - completely gone into the enemy camp! After being drunk and disorderly the entire journey Josie was swept away in a vast limousine at Calcutta, leaving the rest of us sitting at the air terminal feeling foolish! Abbé Singh has just rung up Liz and she is feeling quite perky now!*

*I am missing you so much my darling, and just living for when I can come back. I'm sure I shall never complain about anything again. Try to keep cheerful and don't shut yourself up too much, and don't worry about money. Do you think it would be a good thing to send you up a sweater? I'll wait a few days more and see if I cant bring it. I am very well and sleeping and eating and thinking of you all the time -*

*Love you, love you, love you Totty*

Iris to Donald, C/o Kilburns, Monday [26th Nov]

*My darling,*

*The evening of the same day but I'll start another letter to you and finish it in the morning. Liz is entertaining Abbé Sing in the sitting room and I'm in bed, feeling rather tired, the children are sweet but very exhausting and as I take Adele<sup>278</sup> with me in the afternoon I don't get a minutes peace from endless questions. This morning we took them down the New Market and I bought a pair of shoes as I'm wearing my one pair to shreds. I saw lots of Gwalior pottery which I can bring back. We trailed hither and yon and eventually went to meet Celia and Daphne who were having lunch at "Trincas"<sup>279</sup>, Celia flew off at 5p.m., she was a bit tearful but I thinks its seeing "Fi-fi" around that does it really. John Gill arrived to-day with letters for Daphne but of course you wouldn't have known he was coming. Daphne and Babs came round at tea-time. Poor Daphne it's really very hard for her having to cope with her mothers possible death all on her own. I don't know what one can do to help. Celia said they were all being given return tickets which is something, but I still dont intend to move for a month at least while everyone is "clarifying" things. We're all getting along fine, but I feel it might be a strain for too long, L. and P. never lift a finger to help with the kids, extraordinary self-contained couple. Kathleen rang up this evening, I'm glad I'm not in that jolly group, imagine sitting and staring at Thelma and Hulda all day! Simon Hill's fiancé is going to Delhi with Charlotte (cant remember her other name, Fiona's friend). I believe Mary Clelland<sup>280</sup> is being a frightful nuisance, demanding to go to England though she has nowhere to go. I thought of contacting Milly but cant remember her second name, perhaps John could tell you. She might be able to get me into her Y.W.C.A. if I'm turned out of here! Do you think it might be a good thing to pack a box of silver and letters and get it down by freight plane while the going's good - just in case everything closes down again? I can always bring it back.*

*I feel so homesick now that I'm tired and its evening, I think I'd better not write any more now darling or I shall get gloomy and depress you further. If you do send a box, will you put in my poetry books? Love your lots.*

*Next morning Nothing new, but I feel a bit better, though the moment when I open my eyes is always a bad one. Suddenly I thought that Terry might be getting his local leave, in which case he could bring down a box? Liz is going to lunch with Abbé and the children are better so shes feeling more cheerful. We've been told we can got to Tolleygunge<sup>281</sup> or the Swimming Club but don't seem to be in the mood for either; I see there's a Commercial School advertised so thought I might got round for some speed practise, it would give me something definite to do too. There are actually lots of things I'd like to do, but its difficult fitting in all our plans with the use of the car. The others don't like Latimer but he seems a pleasant young man, we were met at the Airport by Stephenson among others, the one who was sacked from Ophelia, now has a job in the Dooars. Bill (Alwyn) Middleton has also been seen around, don't know how he managed to come with his wife.*

*I hope the dogs arent being a nuisance darling, and you're all keeping well, it seems millions of years since we left.*

*Love you and want you  
lots and lots*

*Totty*

*Iris to her mother, Calcutta, probably on Tuesday 27th November 1962*

*Dear Mummy,*

*What a debacle! It all seems like a bad dream and the air of unreality helped us through a rather grisly experience. We were all penned into the Jorhat Guest House for 24 hours waiting for the planes, hundreds of tired screaming children and total lack of organisation, it was lucky the Chinese decided to call a halt! It was wonderful to see the R.A.F. and the flight down was more comfortable than we feared, in spite of being jammed in all along the*



*corridors and every one of the Indian women and children shrieking simultaneously and ceaselessly.*

*Four of us have been put into a "chummery" (no chums, though we do see shorts and socks hanging up today which suggests they may be in hiding somewhere!) Liz Leetham and 2 children are here, and we're busy keeping them amused, the zoo is just down the road luckily. Daphne Meredith isn't far away; her mother fell and broke her leg in the confusion and is now in hospital waiting for an operation from which they're doubtful if she'll recover, it would be the answer to all their problems if she didn't. Celia went home yesterday, she'd had another heart attack a few days before all this started and was heartbroken at leaving her dog. Daphne managed to get hers down in a knitting bag.*

*We're staying put until we know what's going to happen. I shall stay in Calcutta for a month, by then we should have a clearer idea of the situation. £75 is coming home at the beginning of December which I will have transferred to Alan's account and he'll have to organise the holiday expenses. I'm afraid it'll have to be an austerity Christmas without presents or parties, but I know they'll understand, I don't want to have to cancel Anne's course if I can help it but at the moment can't say what the arrangements are for paying husbands, £75 a month is the maximum we are ever allowed to send under the new rules so shall have to see how much A. is going to cost. Much love to you both, Iris.*

Cyclostyled letter dated 28th November 1962 from The Assam Company, Limited, London, sent to me.

Dear Mr Macfarlane,

All the men are remaining in Assam: all the women and children of the Managerial Staff, both European and Indian have been evacuated to Calcutta.

Here in Calcutta the company's Agents Messrs. Kilburn & Co. Ltd., have made excellent arrangements and the women and children are well housed and well looked after and our Agents have full authority to take any further steps for their well-being that may be necessary. The General Manager's wife is with them and has the brood under wing.

Now for two other angles:-

1. I do not expect the wives to be allowed back in the near future. This is partly because of the problem of feeding additional mouths and partly because, despite the Chinese withdrawal proposals, the Indian attitude to these proposals seems somewhat intransigent, as I see it.
2. I have suggested through Kilburn's that where the husbands are due for leave in 1963, the wives might like to come home pretty soon. I doubt whether many, if any, will accept this, as they are extremely loyal to their husbands, bless them, and would hate to miss an opportunity of going back.

To sum up, everything seems to be under control and let us hope that nationally the same is true.

I have offered to go out immediately if the Agents and General Manager think I can get to Assam and be of any use,

P Remnant, Chairman

Iris to Donald, c/o Kilburns, Wednesday [28th Nov 1962]

*Darling,*

*Well done you, your letter arrived before any of the other wives had heard and I was quite embarrassed at having to open it. It was wonderful to get news, and the letters from home, I was amused at the 2 versions of my mother getting that money out of the bank. She said they*

*gave it "quite off their own bat"! They all seem well and cheerful and quite unconcerned. I'll write to the bank too and tell them what I've organised about sending money. I don't know what's being done about your pay, but I think it would be better not to put any more money into the bank here at the moment, at least until the £75 has gone home at the beginning of December. Apparently they might get suspicious (Reserve Bank) if extra money is suddenly plonked into our accounts and most people have handed their money into Kilburns to keep but I wanted to be sure that the maximum went home. I went to the Y.W.C.A. yesterday and collected some knitting wool and arranged to go for evening speed classes, no accommodation though, I thought I might use Milly's good services that way. Liz went out to lunch with Abbé yesterday, dressed to the nines, can't think what she sees in him, he seems a bumptious little man and is terribly depressing about everything. Seems to take a positive delight in throwing us into pits of gloom. They sat next to the Maharaja of Cooch Bihar and his English wife at lunch who both behaved appallingly apparently, showing off and being thoroughly objectionable. I rang up Kathleen in the evening. They were all sitting in the dark as the lights had fused, must have been quite a relief not to look at Hilda for a bit! Don't believe what Alastair tells you about Josie<sup>282</sup>, he made terribly heavy weather of looking after her; actually she was the chief comic relief of that awful 24 hours in Jorhat the best moment was when she said haughtily "Take your dirty hands off me Hilda Barrie" - gasps of horror all round but I nearly split my sides. I gave her some water from my Thermos which looked a funny colour but she said kindly, "Don't worry, Irish, it's only algae"! Nobody seems to know what's happened to her; poor Josie. She seems to have nobody but Roy in the world. I was amused about Goffie, we thought he would go to pieces without Nita there. Are you getting butter? If not I'll organise some by I.A.C. Keep cheerful darling things might be worse, maybe you could get local leave here in January if I can't get up? I'm waiting for a month anyway unless flatly ordered to leave. Love you lots. Keep my plants watered!*

*Hugs darling - Totty*

Iris to Donald, c/o Kilburns, Thursday [29th Nov 1962]

*My darling - I'm spending the day in the garden today as I have a cold, actually I would like to spend every day here if I had the chance, it is very peaceful, a nice walled garden with a weeping willow and a lawn like a billiard table. The Alipur Road runs down the bottom, a ceaseless flow of traffic but otherwise only the cawing of crows and the distant hammering of tin. The others have gone out, L and P to the zoo. Liz to the Swimming Club. She and I took the kids there yesterday and met a lot of Chabua<sup>283</sup> wives, they're all billeted on families and having the time of their lives, they spend the time talking about all the parties they were going to and seemed to be hoping that the emergency would go on and on! The women who are in the Grand (Phyllis White among them) are also having a whale of a time with Americans (pilots?) personally I'm not in the mood but it's a pity that Prim and Babs can't cash in on it, and Liz come to that. Beryl Greenwood<sup>284</sup> rang up Daphne yesterday to tell her of all the parties she was going to but no suggestion of asking Babs along or helping Daphne with her mother. She really is the most selfish female I've ever encountered. Daphne came to supper yesterday as her host was away, her mother seems to be sinking and hardly conscious now which is a blessing. Daphne is calm and cheerful, I take off my hat to her. Babs is bored stiff and an added worry. I went along to the Y.W.C.A. yesterday evening to start my speed classes but found I would have to pay for this month as well, so decided to start on Monday. I came out. Stood around waiting for a taxi - and stood and stood. I had no idea where I was so couldn't walk anywhere and finally got into a rickshaw in desperation. We hurtled down back streets for what seemed ages, heading I felt sure for some sinister district, however we finally arrived at Park St. to my surprise where I stood thumbing hopelessly for another half*

hour. It was the rush hour and apparently taxis are impossible then, I began to feel I might be arrested for soliciting if I didn't move on so started trudging towards Chowringhee when I bumped into Sal Mulvey<sup>285</sup> and Mrs Mogg<sup>286</sup> and they luckily had a car and brought me home. Sal is all for sending the baby home and trying to get back to Assam, Shillong possibly, as she 's six months gone with another I hardly think she'll succeed. She said Goffy was handing over and coming out pretty smartly, I suppose its the best thing for him to do really, he cant be any help to anyone. All the Daphne Crudens,<sup>287</sup> Cliffords<sup>288</sup> etc. have gone home but not Doreen, who I'd like to meet. Latimer rang up this morning and said they had wired Remnant and asked for a reply by cable as to what to do with us - but whatever happens I'm staying on a month here, I could live very cheaply if I didn't go out and might even be allowed to stay here as it seems to be inhabited only very spasmodically by a mysterious Wilkie Sahib (about whom we have endless jokes!) I've applied for various jobs coaching English, and after a couple of weeks speed classes could set up as a stenographer if necessary. The snag is at the moment not knowing how long one can say one will be staying. Liz is frantic about all her clothes, silver etc. The Jorhat and Amgoorie<sup>289</sup> husbands have been sending boxes down, don't know if you could organise anything via Podder<sup>290</sup> - it might be worth looking into. Would like the typewriter if possible, and silver and a couple of blankets and any clothes you could fit in - as you know I don't set all that store by possessions but the kids letters would be nice to have if nothing else. I know you'll have plenty of worries without this added darling, so don't bother unless it's fairly simple to arrange. The general opinion here seems to be that the Chinese had overstepped themselves anyway and would had to have called a halt, but perhaps thats only wishful thinking, one hears a million different opinions every day and its impossible to make up the mind one has left!

I thought I'd write to Tim and suggest he tried to get Bryn down with someone and tell him I saw Celia just before she left. I mention this in case he says he's had a letter from me and you take Um! Awful stories these women were telling us yesterday about men jumping planes and dogs being left locked in abandoned cars, could hardly believe it.

If you can do it easily darling, could you send the 2 little boxes of pills in my dressing table drawer, in case this cold settles in my tubes?

I don't know if you're getting letters every day, but I'll continue to write them. Try not to get too depressed, if this separation goes on for long you can always resign. All the other Boards have been sending messages of encouragement but not a murmur from ours, we amuse ourselves imagining Remnant's next speech to the shareholders, saying what a grand lot of dead wood he has carrying on in the face of difficulty and danger!

Love you so much darling - Totty

Iris to Donald, [No date] c/o Kilburns

Darling - There is somebody going up to-morrow, so I'm sending this with him in case my letters aren't getting through. I'm writing every day, so far only 1 from you but I know they're getting held up. Liz hasn't heard at all yet and Kathleen twice and Sheila Ray every day so its obvious that theres a muddle somewhere. The case you sent down has arrived. Thank you very much darling, everything I wanted down to my little pills! Liz is livid as Ian has sent rubbish she says, but she seems to have masses of clothes with her. As you can imagine we're getting a teeny, weeny bit on each other's nerves, I'm now an unpaid ayah and she goes floating off leaving me with the children. they're very sweet but terribly demanding. This afternoon I said I must have my room to myself for a rest as I had a bad night. My cold is much better to-day, and I dont think its going to settle in my tubes. We went in and met the other Nazira girls to-day, they seem to spend their time in the hairdresser. I also met Milly who is looking much slimmer and nicer. She's put me onto a couple of hostels if we get kicked

*out of here, nothing from the board as yet, they're probably trying to find some way out of paying our return passages! I'm still determined to stay for another month, so please don't try to stop me darling. It won't cost any more than going home, and at least I can pay my way here in rupees and not precious pounds. We had a visit from the head of Macleods yesterday telling us that 4 more women and 9 children might be landing on us here which sunk us into further depths, but no signs of them as yet. We have a nice but ancient cook who would swoon at the thought of 17 head I'm sure. We do his book every evening and were presented with "Killer - As4" yesterday - we presumed he meant bananas after a lot of wild guesses!*

*"D" day approaching and I'm thinking of you darling and keeping my fingers crossed. I fear nothing much will happen and this state of indecision continue. I will send up a sweater for you - come to think of it, I'll go out this afternoon and send it up with this letter - thats a wonderful idea. I am thinking of you all the time, write as often as you can and try not to get depressed. I'm so glad you sent my poetry book - I love you darling and waiting to be back in your arms. [illegible word],* TOTTY

Iris to Donald, Monday [3rd Dec 1962]

*Another letter for Liz - four to my two - please write every other day.*

*My darling,*

*Another letter from you yesterday, I was beginning to feel a bit weepy as letters were pouring in for everyone else and I hadn't heard after that first note. I'm glad you aren't too depressed darling, its the uncertainty thats so trying and not knowing what plans to make. I'm very sorry about Candy but it couldn't be helped. I was wondering if Terry was coming on local leave and if so what about him bringing the other 2 dogs? There are parks around where I could exercise them, and if you get booted out we could take them home. I would love to have them with me, it would give me something definite to look after and meat is cheap here. If you think its feasible try and get them collars and leads and get the J.W. to take them out to get into practise. I'll try to get something for Tessa's skin anyway.*

*I'm sitting in the garden this morning, the others have gone off to town, and its very peaceful with only the crows and wagtails. I'm terribly tired of shops and cafe's and traffic and am hoping, if I play my cards right, to be able to stay on here for a few weeks. Accommodation in Calcutta is sinister and expensive, I went round all the hostels, the other morning and they were all booked, anyway they're rather grim with iron gates clanged to at 10p.m. Hotels are all profiteering madly and out of the question. Liz is moving in with the Sawtells<sup>291</sup> this evening, she met them at the races and they asked her to stay (or knowing Liz she asked herself!) Anyway I encouraged it, as I think another week of the children and I'd have put my head into the bathroom boiler. It came to a head on Saturday when I'd planned to go out to lunch and see a flick, when she announced Abbé was taking her to the races and she was afraid children weren't allowed! She said she's be back by five which meant I could have managed the second house, but finally rolled up at a quarter to seven gaily apologising, but she'd met so many people she knew she just couldn't get away. The children had been terribly naughty, flung their supper everywhere and shrieked so hard we couldn't even talk, so when she said she thought of moving I'm afraid I couldn't conceal my delight. I like Liz in lots of ways but she is quite hopeless with the kids, alternately slaps and shouts but never plays with them or provides any amusements and spends so much time on her hair, nails etc. that they're clambering over me from dawn to dusk. She said the Sawtells had had a wire from Leslie at the time of the second emergency saying "Can you accommodate self and Lampetts?" so he obviously thought he really was leaving that morning in his brown store suit with his four huge suitcases. Yesterday I joined the Tolley tribe at the swimming club for lunch, met Doreen Brown there quite cheerful, she's waiting till the end of the week to decide.*

*I popped in on Mrs Munsey first, she looks like a corpse laid out for entombing - shrivelled and yellow and rattling like a coal-skuttle and slashes of violent lipstick and nail polish make it worse. I cant see how she can get through an operation, even a small one. She is having it tomorrow. Hilda and Tyll and Thelma are wilting somewhat but it was nice to see Kathleen, Gill and Milly took us out to the rowing club for tea and Gill rowed for a bit - very pleasant spot with palm trees and lakes and tables laid out on a bright green lawn. Gill is fat and pasty and still drivelling interminably but it was kind of them. Kathleen had a cold and went home, but we went back to listen to classical music being played across the misty water with a young moon in the palms, very beautiful and soothing except that Gill wasn't even attempting to cut a long story short and we were being chewed alive by mosquitoes. Finally they took me to a Chinese restaurant where we had quite a nice meal which gave me heartburn for the rest of the night, and tried to discover if there were transmitters hidden in the cruet. There seems to be no anti-Chinese feeling in Calcutta except for a few pigeon-chested youths marching in silent protest past the legation, which sight must cheer the Chinese considerably. I really must try and write an article about this experience, might even make some money! Haven't had any answers to my applications for jobs but am starting my speed classes this evening and perhaps something may come of that.*

*Liz is back from town with the news that James Warren are stopping paying for their people from tomorrow, but nothing has been heard from our board, their lethargy is quite welcome for once. I'm writing to the bank to-day asking them to put the £75 into Fiona's account and the 3 of them will have to cope. fearful Um will be taken by Mummy no doubt! What about sending the rates thing home and asking the bank to pay it? I hope your sweater arrived darling, my Christmas present but I hope I'll be up to bring another. The R.A.F. told us they were standing ready at Dum Dum to rescue the rest of you if need be so I dont think any of your or Simpsons plans will probably have to be put into effect - Cant imagine Goffy on the road to Mokochung somehow! Havent seen Nita to talk to. My cold is nearly gone, just a little catarrh left. I wish I could see the compound, write often and tell me what flowers are out, surely we shall know within the next few days whether we shall be able to get back.*

*Keep cheerful darling - love you lots -*

*Totty*

Iris to Donald, c/o Kilburns, Calcutta [4-5th Dec 1962]

*Darling - I've moved to Liz's room which is far more comfortable with an Air Conditioner and hot bath water and a bedside lamp. She left to stay with the Sawtells yesterday evening and frankly its a great relief, she is so spoilt and did nothing but complain and order the servants about and the children were rapidly breaking the place apart. It's a pity Liz is so hopelessly spoilt, she expect everything and everyone to fall at her feet and the sad thing is they usually do. I wonder how long the Sawtells will enjoy having her brats, it looks as if we might be thrown out of here as the Wilkie Sahib has chosen this moment to take to himself a Memsahib - of all tactless things! He is bringing her back on Saturday. I shall have to pay a visit to the office tomorrow and find out if we can keep in one room, and do our own cooking as there's a stove up here. No word from the board still, they're obviously delaying till the last moment in the hopes that they wont have to pay out passages home! I shall ask for a sea passage in January, by then we should know something definite. If you can get a tin box down with knives and forks and books (poetry and so on) and the rest of my clothes, I will sent all the silver home together by freight. It doesn't look very hopeful for a job now, but I shall try to get something to do, Red Cross or RSPCA or something. I started my "speed classes" yesterday, found I couldn't quite keep up with the "fast" class but was ahead of the "slow" ones. We're taught by a man, much coy banter "Oh please sir you're so fast sir oh*

*Sir"! Afterwards I stood for ¾ hour outside the Grand trying to get a taxi, legging it up and down the gutter and always pipped at the post. Finally was leaning exhausted against a pillar when an odious gent came and leant too and asked me why I was looking so lonely and continued to try and engage me in chat - I really felt myself being "picked up" in a Calcutta drain - or thats how it felt in my overwrought state. Finally shared a taxi with masses of Yanks (mostly ladies) whom I regaled with mildly exaggerated stories of my escape to a chorus of "Gee! Isn't that terrible?" and who all pressed my hand fervently when we parted. I rather expected some dollars for a poor displaced person! This morning I woke up with awful griping pains and have been feeling rotten all day, but Tim's pills have worked wonders and I'm quite recovered this evening. Lavender and I thought we would do our Bit by going to the Blood Bank this morning, but after being led down endless dingy corridors we finally found ourselves in front of a locked door and were told that it would probably be open tomorrow - was frankly relieved and we'll try and find somewhere more sanitary-looking to have it done. The doctor has told Daphne that he cant operate, that even without an operation her mother only has 15% chance of survival - so I suppose she'll just have to stay her till she dies at Rs 80 a day. Lets hope it wont be too long for everyones sake.*

*I'll finish this in the morning, should get a really good night with no mosquitoes. Good-night darling.*

*I did have a wonderful night, the best I've had, which was just as well as we had a visit from McNeil and Barries this morning saying they would give us open return passages if we left straight away, but that the offer might not remain open - a polite form of blackmail and really I don't know what alternative we have but to accept. I said I wanted to wait a few more weeks & then go by sea but he said he didn't know if they would pay our passages in a few weeks. M & B have taken things into their own hands as they can't get any sense out of Remnant. I dont want to go darling, but in the present circumstances I don't see how I can not and with a return ticket in our hands we shall be able to come back just as soon as the all clear is given. It seems impossible to get any form of accommodation in Calcutta and I have heard nothing about jobs either. Please don't be too depressed, I shall be back just as soon as I can, and if the emergency continues I honestly think you should resign, if you can clear your debts. I'll see about import licences so you can bring Dinah home. I'll write again every day darling, and may not go at once so please dont fret yet. Have just been round to see Liz who has various parties booked for the week-end and says nothing will induce her to go, she obviously loathes the thought of going home and looking after the children where here she can get an ayah and enjoy herself, she says Mrs Sawtell will arrange a job for her with the High Commission though she cant type or in fact do anything - they probably will too, its so like her to fall on her feet! However if I have the return ticket actually in my hand and can come back the minute you give the all-clear I see no particular advantage in staying on in Calcutta. We'll be a bit pressed for money this month, but I shall go to the board and get my ticket money up, and in Jan. will get a job to help out if I'm not back. Its only a question of 24 hours further away from you and at least I shall be with the kids and be able to help over Anne. Cant bear the thought of sharing a house with Mummy, and wonder where we'll all fit in. We don't have to make up our minds for a few days so perhaps something definite with have happened re. the Chinese. Do hope you don't think I'm deserting you darling but now I know the Board has no say in when we use our return halves I feel I can come back almost as quickly as from here. I'd be prepared to use it if you got local leave even, and then stay on until you resign and we go home together. I'll send some skin stuff up for Tessa, make the sweeper bath her every day with Dettol rinse. I expect Ian will be very smug if Liz stays on, but she never gives him a thought (don't tell him that for heavens sake!) its all the Cooch Bihars these days!*

*Love you lots darling, keep cheerful*

*Totty*



Iris to Alan, Calcutta [4-5th Dec 1962]

*Will be home as soon as this – arriving next week!*

*My dear Alan,*

*Daddy forwarded your letter, and it was very comforting thinking of you sitting by your fire writing essays on Cromwell with the snow falling and the tape recorder turning. My life seems to have suddenly up-ended but as long as the three of you can carry on with yours uninterrupted I shant mind too much.*

*Calcutta is a terribly depressing place to be in for any length of time, the suffering is so blatant and so hopeless, everywhere you turn there is some monstrosity holding out a twisted stump or a blind child and the animals are almost as bad. Every time I go out I feel sick with shame and disgust that all this filthy starving humanity it should be allowed to go on living like this but honestly I don't know whether I could bring myself to touch one of them even, so a fat lot of good I should be when it came to helping.*

*This morning Lavender and I thought we'd try and do our bit by going to the Blood Bank, but after a lot of stumbling down alleyways and being re-directed back along dingy corridors we arrived at a sleepy figure scratching himself outside a locked door with the information that it was closed and might open to-morrow!*

*As you can imagine our only conversation is "What will the Chinese do?" but nobody knows, not even the Chinese probably! Our next big talking point is what the company is going to do with us, a lot of wives have been sent home with return tickets, but we haven't had a word from our board, I imagine they're waiting to see if they can't possibly avoid the expense of paying our passages home.*

*I've decided that if nothing definite happens, I shall come home by boat, in January, the problem is getting reasonable accommodation here, alas the elderly Burra Sahib who lived alone in this vast place has taken unto himself a Memsahib (Of all tactless things to do at this juncture!) so I fear our presence will not be popular.*

*None of my applications for jobs has been answered and I feel it's hardly worth looking for one now, just for a month. I shall try and find some Red Cross work to do and am taking speed classes in Shorthand 3 evenings a week so by the time I do come home I should be employable.*

*Our days are spent pretty aimlessly, wandering round shops, meeting each other for coffee, sitting at the swimming club occasionally. I think it's the pointless "filling in time" that is depressing us so much. Also I've had a cold and a tummy upset to drag me down further. Daddy must be feeling it more though, he managed to get down a case with silver, letters, and "The Lord of the Rings" in it and some extraordinary clothes – fishing trousers mainly.*

*Everything in Assam is quite normal he says I really think if this goes on for long he will resign, a lot of people feel the same as we feel we have the Chinese with us for years. A lot of pigeon-chested Bengali students marched up and down in front of the Chinese consulate yesterday "in silent protest" which sight must have cheered the inmates considerably!*

*Liz Leetham and the children have moved out and gone to stay with friends... Living with people under these conditions certainly shows them up ... Lavender on the other hand has an inexhaustible sense of humour which helps considerably and is ready to take whatever comes and has gone up no end in my estimation. Poor Daphne Meredith, her mother is dying (or so the doctor says) and she has no prospect except to wait with her here till she dies.*

*Sun is sinking, another odd day over, tomorrow I shall go to the Park St Cemetery which is very interesting, and the municipal library and try and find myself something useful to do.*

*I feel so sad your birthday and Christmas should pass like this, but I'll get you a proper present and we'll celebrate properly when this nightmare is over. How is the grant going?  
Much love – Mummy*

Iris to Donald, c/o Kilburns, Thursday [6 Dec 1962]

*Darling,*

*Mr Trinnick<sup>292</sup> is going up to Assam to-morrow so will send this off with him. Its amazing how many husbands are here "to see their wives off" - also ran into Daker Mogg and there've been several others. Why should they have this special privilege I wonder. I can't think whats happening to your letters, have only had two in a fortnight, Liz has had six and I got one from Tim Edye this morning dated Dec. 4th while your last one was dated Nov. 26th. Do you think its anything to do with the dak wallah? Anyway darling, address your next home, as I've asked for a passage on Sunday. It seems silly to miss this chance of spending Christmas with the kids when I can come back whenever I like, as soon as you cable me in fact. I've asked for a through ticket to Manchester, will see Fiona and go on by bus. We all went in to Macneil and Barries this morning where a very nice Mr Torporavala said he would arrange everything for us, when Tyll suddenly announced that nobody was making our arrangements except Tradewings. Mr T. said icily that as Macneil and Barries were giving us the tickets he suggested they should make the arrangements, but Tyll insisted that it must be nobody else but Tradewings. Mr T. was livid and for one awful moment I thought he was going to withdraw the whole offer - why the fuss I wonder, have the Simpsons got shares in Tradewings? ! Considering all M&B have done for us here I thought it very ungracious and foolish. I believe some more boxes are coming down, if you can get the canteen, spare blankets, books and clothes down in a tin trunk I've asked Kilburns to look after it for us here. Phyllis White has asked to go by cargo boat as she has a little dog with her, I thought of that but thought we might be allowed back in 3 weeks or so, and I should feel silly if I was still on my way home! Have met her several times and she has been very sensible and uncomplaining. Liz has made herself very unpopular all round, she treats Latimer as if he were a bearer, and is the only one to refuse this offer of going home, she stormed up to "the man at the top" of Macneills and got him to say that she could go whenever she liked, though we were told in no uncertain terms that if we didn't go now the offer might not remain open. We naturally find this more than a little irritating, even Tyll is fed up with her so it probably wont do her any good in the long run. Tyll told me that when we arrived at the Airport Liz went prancing up to one of the men and said she wanted to be billeted with her as I was going to act as her ayah! I'm glad I didn't hear that, don't for goodness sake pass it on. My letters sound very catty but I lament you'd like to hear all the little tit-bits, anyway all living on top of each other like this we're bound to see the worst. We broke out and went to a cinema yesterday "Rachel Cade", silly but nice. Afterwards had a delicious kebab in an Indian restaurant, and met Tim Newman Rogers<sup>293</sup> who has been helping Americans shoot tigers (so he says?) and was supposed to be meeting us to-day and taking the girls dancing to-night - but he never turned up. He says he saw you on Saturday? Daker Mogg is going back on Saturday or Sunday so I'll send Tessa's skin stuff and another letter with him.*

*Do write darling, feel so miserably neglected when everyone else is hearing. While I'm at home I'll fix import licences for the dogs in case we need to get them out in a hurry.*

*Must set off with this before it gets dark -*

*All love - Totty*

Iris to Alan, [undated letter, c.10th December 1962, from Calcutta]

*My dear Alan,*

*What a strange way to be writing you a birthday letter, sitting by myself by the open window of a strangers house in Calcutta with the delicious evening Indian smells of wood-smoke and spice drifting in – and a sadness in my heart that I shant after all be with you to celebrate. We had news to-day that we're to be allowed back, and I'm going up to-morrow. I know you'll understand that that is where I must be, apart from Daddy needing me, this crisis has made me realise how attached I am to this hopeless, tragic, ridiculous country and how much I regretted leaving at a time like this.*

*You know, though, that our thoughts will be with you, I wish we could have given you a more memorable present, maybe the book won't even arrive in time. I shall get you something really nice on my way home next year, so that'll give you a year to think about it. If you are pleased with us as parents I can assure you it's nothing to our pleasure in you, it seems the most fortunate thing on earth to have children one really truly enjoys, as people quite apart from family. This last couple of weeks have shown me (what I knew to be true with my mind, but sometimes lost sight of) that nothing in life in the way of material possessions matters at all – that one is rich without them, as rich as we are with all that we haven't got. Horrible generalisations, much to be despised by Oxbridge – but I feel full of emotion and thankfulness to-night that Assam is to be spared the horrors that we thought were inevitable as we sped out of it. I have been praying consciously for the first time for years (to the God of the Gurkhas and Sikhs and Chinese too) but can't say whether this has helped. Let's hope this isn't just a breathing spell and that Nehru will be a little more tactful in his public utterances.*

*Daddy has just been down for 3 days which was a lovely surprise, he left this morning vastly cheered by the news that I was to follow. He was looking fine in spite of what must have been a very trying time, and spent most of the time here stuffing himself with lobster! Life has been much more peaceful since Liz Leetham left...*

*Jack Simpson arrived this morning, he has earned himself the name of Flap-jack as he has spent the last fortnight in Assam making Plans of Escape, all of which involved walking out and leaving the gardens at the first possible opportunity – his ideas were ludicrous – everyone was to take hoes, axes, tins of sardines and any gold they happened to have lying about (!) and head for the Naga Hills. Visions of some of our portly managers trudging through the jungle with gold bars and corned beef has made us mildly hysterical. He has been such a bad example over all this that I'm afraid all his authority will have gone. The whole thing has been an eye-opener, the oddest people going to pieces.*

*I decided after all to put £50 into Fiona's account for the holidays as hers is in Ambleside, I leave it to you how to deal with it but as money is so hard to get home these days I know you'll go slow on expensive Christmas presents! Anne is staying in Edinburgh she says, wisely I think though Granny will be hurt.*

*I hope you'll manage to celebrate your birthday somehow. We shall be drinking your health and planning your future – wrongly I daresay.*

*With very much love and birthday blessings – Mummy*

*Donald to Alan, Cherideo, 13th December 1962.*

*My dear Alan,*

*I owe you for two letters and of course it's your birthday, 21st. All the very best and I only wish we could be with you as well we might have been! This last three weeks have been of chaos, anguish, partings and reunions. All I know now is that Mummy is back in Cherideo, and we refuse to part again, even if all the Chinese descend on us. You will have had news in*

*detail from Mummy, she had some wonderful tales, some amusing and some sad. I have kept her letters and will show them to you one day. I spent two days in Calcutta with Mummy the idea being that she was off to the U.K., so I thought I might as well see her off from Calcutta. This fortunately proved a waste of money as the ban for the return of European ladies was lifted, literally just hours before the Assam Co lot were due to go. Incidentally Mummy was one of the first to return to Assam and she is only Memsahib for miles round. Apart from this life has been quite normal and all my staff and labourers have behaved wonderfully, not a bit of panic. This may be due to the fact that they do not realise what would happen if the Chinese took over their land. Actually I don't think anybody does. Typical of Remnant to write that piffle to you all, the two people who showed up badly in this was "Flap Jack" Simpson and his wife. Not really his wife's fault as she is just a little mouse and certainly hasn't got any wings!*

*Anyway it's all finished now, thank goodness, and the less post mortems that are done the better.*

*Prospects for fishing look brighter and there is a chance that we may be able to get further up the river than we have been able to do for some time. Mummy and I are going up to the Military post on Sunday to see the Commander who can give permission.*

*Glad you have been seeing Penny lately, she's a very nice girl and you are lucky, please give her my regards next time you see her or you write to her. Well thats my effort at writing, not very brilliant, but meant to let you know I will be thinking of you on your birthday.*

*Lots of love, Daddy*

Iris from Cherideo, December 14th 1962

*Darlings,*

*This is a Christmas letter for Fiona and Alan, I presume Anne is sticking to her plan and spending it up north. I just can't get the faintest feeling of the festive season what with all this coming and going, but it will be a very happy one for me, even though I'm sad I shant be with you after all. I have done nothing about presents except that I want you three to have five pounds each to spend on clothes or tapes and not on toothpaste! If this arrives in time would you get Granny and Granpa something out of my money too, I don't know what, gloves or slippers perhaps. Could you send the money to Anne please?*

*I hope you will have a very happy day darlings, not too concentrated round the Aga and the Telly, and will get a few presents. When you go to church you can say a big prayer of thanks from us, it seems miraculous that I'm sitting on my verandah again looking out onto the Naga hills with the lovely familiar shapes of the trees and shadows and the background of birds that I never thought I would see again.*

*Strange to relate I had a perfectly straightforward flight up, we landed at Tezpur and I thought I might cause a stir being the first white lady there since the emergency but nobody turned a hair. My only slightly uneasy moment what when we came in twice to land at Gauhati and then zoomed up again, I gave a hollow laugh and said to my companion "Don't look now, but the wheels have stuck" – but you can't see the wheels on a Dakota anyway, and I think it was really because there was already a plane on the runway.*

*I came up with a Mr Kincaid<sup>294</sup>, we were travelling as Mr and Mrs Kelly which was a little awkward as we didn't even know each other, he turned out to be a quiet, dull kind man, just the job for a flight as I took a tranquilliser and closed my eyes on the whole beastly business. He sent me home in his car and Daddy wasn't very surprised to see me, he said he knew I was coming that day. The dogs welcomed me as if I'd just been away for half an hour, they are both looking very well as Daddy has been drinking black coffee and milkless tea and they have been getting every drop of milk our cow has been giving (it doesn't give many drops I*

regret to say). Assam looked indescribably beautiful as I drove back along that road which we took out on what Lavender calls the "shameful cavalcade."

The rice is nearly cut but there are still women bending over it in the golden fields, I was even glad to see the cook who assured me he hadn't eaten or slept since I left, but looks remarkably well on it. Nothing will ever move me from here again, not until the Chinese are on my doorstep and then I shall walk out with Daddy.

Let's hope it won't come to that, now I have had time to simmer down and think things over I am right behind Nehru in his firmness at not giving in to China's demands. This is my motherland too and I'm damned if I shall give up any of its "sacred soil", anyway why do the Chinese want that bit of mountainous, unproductive country? There can only be one reason, and if they get it they will stand and threaten India for ever, and probably do a nice line in indoctrination and intimidation too. They have got to be stopped somewhere, if India had gone to Tibet's help this would never have happened, and if she lets them slide into Bhutan and Nepal and the final battle will only be bitterer. She has a magnificent army if they are properly armed and clothed, far better than the Chinese.

Anyway this is hardly the spirit of peace and goodwill, I feel terribly sorry for both armies now, it has suddenly got much colder and we hear there was snow in Shillong yesterday so they must be absolutely frozen. I have knitted several balaclava helmets which I must get to them!

Daddy and I are drawing up a programme for the labour, I am going to teach the girls [first] aid and knitting and he is going to organise the boys into P.T. and simple drill, They are all dying to do something but all they can think of is to march backwards and forwards out of step with wooden rifles over their shoulders, and go on "route marches" to the main road and back. We're not really supposed to take an active part in what is going on but feel we can at least direct them a little.

The rest of the women are coming back from Calcutta to-day, and Jack S. so our peace is over, I was amused to hear that Tyll had taken me under her wing in Calcutta, and I believe that another letter followed with more lies about seeing that the men were fed, every other company arranged food parcels for them, ours needless to say did nothing.

Terry has got off on his local leave, I'm glad as he was looking forward to it so much. He has gone up in my estimation enormously over all this, and says it has changed his views on India and he discovers a great affection for it that he never suspected.

We have a new assistant coming here, Fitzpatrick Robinson<sup>295</sup>, who Daddy says is exactly like David Manzi Fe to look at and is very nice and intelligent. Terry is going to Dooma Dullung. I forgot to tell you Fiona that I met Mrs Hannay in the Grand Hotel, she wasn't going to recognise me at first but I went up and spoke to her and she said in a really nasty way, "and how's that mad Fiona?" I said curtly that you were very well and she said "She never bothered to get in touch with Kay you know. We waited all summer". I snarled back that you were also waiting to hear from Kay and with that we parted, what an extraordinary woman. Next time I saw her she gave me a frigid smile and turned away. I gathered from Doreen that she was trying to do the Burra Mem but not being very successful so perhaps that was why she was bitter. I feel at the moment that I never want to see anyone or in fact leave my compound for months and months.

Some of my flowers are coming out and we are eating beans and lettuce, the most wonderful moment is when I wake up in the morning and find myself home, with a Malabar thrush outside the window instead of the Calcutta crows. I wish I could have some of those poor little urchins here to run on the grass and eat as much as they wanted, but what would one do with them then? We have no plans for Christmas, shall go up the river I expect, I shall ask Tim Edye to stay I think and possibly Robert though I've done nothing about getting in special food.

*Can't think how you have managed to live on so little Fiona, no wonder you're thin, darling you must eat butter and eggs and cheese. Anyway you will be able to get yourself a decent dress out of your savings, I suppose Anne Johnson will be up but I do want you to rest and relax as much as possible. Give my love to Beryl, I'll be writing to her in a day or two, I gather Tansy<sup>296</sup> now lives with us, I didn't think Granny would be able to hold out against her for long.*

*God bless you both, have a very happy time ....  
All our love, Mummy*

*On the way up in the plane I was longing to have a tape recorder to play the Coffee Cantata<sup>297</sup> on my first evening home, but believe it or not Radio Australia played it from start to finish, reception perfect, just as I had finished my bath and was settling down by our log fire. Blissful moment.*



1963

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, January 15th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Hope you can raise your nose from the grindstone long enough to read this, as I imagine you will be back by your little electric logs with the tape recorder going and the typewriter tapping. Do hope it doesn't really feel like prison, these are still supposed to be the happiest days of your life don't forget! I'm sending a reply to the letter you copied out, not that I think it will be printed as the letter appeared a good while ago (I know, because Granpas views on Nehru were taken from it which just shows how a sensible person can be influenced by such tripe) but mainly to let off steam!*

*I'm still wanting to tackle the Moguls, Robert Shaw has seven volumes on them which I was hoping he would be bringing over soon but he has had a car smash and has broken ribs so I don't suppose he will be able to drive around for a bit. I shall have to make an expedition over and collect them myself, and I'm going to write to the Calcutta library to see if I can get books from them, the trouble is I would want eye witness accounts and journals written at the time which would probably be too valuable to send. Can't see Daddy letting me take a trip to Calcutta to make notes?*

*We're waiting breathlessly for Lord Rosebery,<sup>298</sup> send me all the cuttings on him won't you. I'm glad you got the new Tolkien which sounds wonderful from the reviews and snatches I've read, John is reading the Rings and is bringing them home with him for you. Daddy is deep in "Florence Nightingale" at the moment, he keeps telling me how good it is and how I must read it, considering it was I who snatched it from a pile of books that Tim Edye was going to give away to a Naga. However I've still got lots of your books left to read, am trying to spin them out as the library is right back to normal again, not a book in sight.*

*We went away on Saturday night to stay with Tim Edye, and spent the evening glued to the wireless listening to Scotland beating France at Rugger and then Daddy and Tim stayed up till twelve arguing whether there were a pair of players called Spong and Sobie in 1928 playing for England, huge bets were being laid, tables pounded etc. but the argument hasn't been resolved yet, perhaps you know? I can't believe Tim made up those names.*

*On Sunday we joined the Merediths for a picnic up the Jhanzi river, a smaller muddier edition of ours but very pleasant, Daphne seems to be getting over her mother's death<sup>299</sup> and is looking much better. Tim wanted us to stay another night but I was worried about my monkey and hurried back to find he had gone into his box like a lamb and was curled up fast asleep in the straw when I arrived panting and distraught with worry. Why I constantly chain myself to the wretched animals I don't know, there must be some deep and sinister reason I feel. He is a little friendlier, will let me tickle his tummy and pulls my hair but is still not brave enough to let me hold him.*

*We're awaiting the arrival of the Chairman on Thursday without wild enthusiasm, I don't suppose we shall see much of him he makes sure that nobody has a chance of saying any of the things they've been storing up for the past year! We shall be told what a grand lot of chaps we are and that will be that.*

*Doesn't seem to be much in the way of news, Daddy's good spirits after the Rugger have been damped by the cricket and he is wanting his lunch too so had better remove my clutter and let them lay the table.*

*Sorry this is so dull, I took all the time over Mr Tiptoft<sup>300</sup>!*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, January 29th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter which I tore open the wrong way and had to piece together and read in the Ladies at the club as we collected it on our way into see the film – but it was very welcome in spite of the hazards!*

*Money first to get it over – I have told the bank to transfer £30 to your account as soon as our money gets home at the beginning of Feb, and will send another £30 in March. I hope this will see you through the next couple of months, £4.10 doesn't seem much to live on a week and you'll need lots of brain building food this next few months. Hows the Guinness going have you acquired a taste for it? We do not want this paid back out of your grant, you will need every penny of that I'm sure, our financial situation is slowly but steadily improving, the chief difficulty now is the restrictions the Indian government have put on sending it home.*

*I think the Canada and South America idea sounds wonderful, we will help with your fare of course, in fact could probably manage it all by the autumn. I should let the question of your career ride until after the results of your exam come through as a lot depends on what sort of degree you get. The Bhagavad Gita has some wise things to say about work, Work is Worship is one of its main themes in fact. I'm glad it finally arrived. I'm into Tawney now and find it very interesting, specially with the little bit of "O" level knowledge I still retain, the problem of how to reconcile one's religion with the rat race is almost impossible to resolve. One can see the enormous attraction of the monastic life, and all the Indian saints who spent their lives sitting under trees really never had it so easy.*

*Here we are still without rain and everything is beginning to look parched, the dust is ghastly of course and makes travelling a misery. Last Friday I arranged to take Daphne and her Director, Admiral and Lady Walker,<sup>301</sup> to see the Naga bazaar. They drove for an hour and a half through clouds of dust only to find that the day of the bazaar had been changed and Nagas there were none – actually three or four had arrived and we saw them having their hair cut which was quite amusing but I felt rather embarrassed about it all. They came on here to tea, the Admiral is a benign, weather beaten gent with a hook, his wife a dumpy little lady, mild and white-haired but she was apparently a "two gun woman" at shoots and a daring dirt track rider! What either of them knew about tea I don't know, nothing that one could put a finger on but being a Director of a tea company is certainly a pleasant business, Mrs Remnant is coming out by boat, spending a week in Bombay and then going back by boat, all at our expense!*

*We haven't seen anything of our pair, but they are giving their "party" on Saturday, a fearful business, we all go to the club and stand around for two hours in our best suits trying to pretend we are just one large happy family. I would so much rather stay and play with my monkey who is gayer, cleverer and more beautiful than any planter.*

*He is becoming a little tamer every day and we spend half an hour together after lunch, him lying on his back while I tickle his tummy, when I get up to go he gets into a frightful rage and hurls himself round his cage grinding his teeth.*

*I'm sorry to say I still haven't got down to anything definite, I'm doing quite a bit of drawing nowadays which I find less demanding than writing, I suppose because I know I'm not much good and my standards are lower.*

*Anne seems to be settled and I hope will manage to spend a day with you if the weather allows. Jean Macfarlane's sister<sup>302</sup> & husband are settling in Manchester so the whole clan will be there soon.*

*Don't work too hard, please – it's only one spring when you will be twenty one!*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, February 6th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Assam seems to have exhausted its supply of Air Letter forms and I can't wait any longer so herewith this kind which will take a little longer to reach you but goodness knows when the Nazira Post Master will get round to indenting for any more forms. Something peculiar is going on with the typewriter as at each new line a silver thing springs up and covers the place I'm supposed to be writing on, really the hazards of trying to get a letter written.*

*Thank you for yours, I'm glad you aren't working yourself silly, I should think the time has come to start to digest all the vast files of information you have amassed hasn't it? I am deep in Tawney now and find it quite fascinating, have you read it? The central problem is the one you're facing now in thinking of your future, when does money-making become avarice, when does "enterprise" end and greed begin – and the book deals with the thoughts of the Church & the reformers on the subject. I simply can't come to any conclusions. The fact is that for oneself poverty (as if I've ever been really poor, but relatively speaking) means nothing, but money does buy the things one would like for one's children.*

*This was driven home when Granny wrote the other day saying we were being very unfair on you to keep you so financially insecure. I'm afraid I was very cross and wrote back rather nastily, which I'm regretting, but it was just another dig at Daddy who thinks of practically nothing else but how to get money home – the reason for my crossness too was partly that I knew she was right and that you don't any of you have enough. And yet – in Calcutta I felt that every penny we earned should go towards trying to alleviate in some tiny way the terrifying misery, of three quarters of the population. What to do? In my case just muddle & drift on getting psychotic headaches & tired feelings from submerged guilt complexes about you & the starving children of Calcutta I suppose – but in yours a life of helping would probably be possible. I still think a year or two's travel would be excellent, during which you might find a particular place or people you would like to settle down with – and then a course in social organisation to fit you for the practical side. Or you might like to do it the other way round. You would get a grant to cover it at a provincial university I'm sure, I'm always seeing them advertised.*

*Anne seems to be working like several slaves & then wants to go abroad for 6 months which would be an excellent idea I think though with the common market collapse<sup>303</sup> the openings for French speaking secretaries won't be so vast.*

*Here we have a grey day at last & a few drops of rain, it was the most blissful feeling waking up in the night & hearing it dripping off the roof, the first rain since we came back. I had young Primrose Corps<sup>304</sup> staying for a few days last week and on Friday she & Terry and I went up the river. It was a lovely day, a sort of silky day when everything you see and do seems right and new, I don't know why some days should be like that & some gritty from the word go. Anyway we didn't do anything very exciting really, Terry & Prim swam & sunbathed and the Major at the outpost drove me up a very steep narrow road cut out of the side of the hill to the Nazira coal mine where there is a beautiful empty bungalow perched high above the river – I'm trying to get Daddy up there for a week-end before the rains set in!*

*I came back & joined the others for lunch which we ate where a family of Nagas were preparing the ground for sowing, digging at it with pointed iron sticks. Afterwards they gave me tea and betel nut and all sorts of gruesome bits of bark to chew and I took out my teeth to show them and I can't tell you how funny and peaceful it all was! I got back soaked in sunshine and full of stored up pictures of girls with scarlet leaves behind their ears to find Granny's letter waiting - crash!*

*The next day was the "party" given by the directors at the club, a boring event as you can imagine & we went on to hear Wales beating Scotland at Rugger so it wasn't the happiest of evenings. I'm going up to Jorhat on Friday & hope to meet Robert Shaw & get the "Moguls" from him, am rearing to go now that I've had my historical sense reawakened by Tawney. I'm not thinking in terms of writing a book for publication, just want to get "involved" in a period and learn some Indian history. I did try Assamese history on "History To-day" but they weren't interested though they wrote a very nice letter saying they enjoyed the article. Do hope the money has arrived, Richard says he'll help over temporary shortages & I'd rather you didn't even discuss the subject with Granny. Thought the enclosed was rather amusing – me to the life in a year or two.*

*Much love – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Feb 12th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Now I have a form I've lost my typewriter, it finally got too temperamental for words & has been removed to Sibsagar for treatment which will take anything up to 6 months! Nothing from you this week but we don't expect too many letters now, just hope the money has arrived.*

*I'm sitting on the verandah on a lovely breezy Aprilish day, appreciating it specially after a day in bed yesterday with a bilious attack. I spent a bad night & slept a good deal of yesterday but in between read "Florence Nightingale" so now I no longer want to write History but rush off and nurse the sick, under appalling conditions – I'm sure it's the sign of a very weak character to be so swayed by everything your reading. I will study the Moguls though, if I can get the books. I hoped to see Robert Shaw on Friday when I went up to Jorhat to see the final of the Roberts Cup (polo) but he wasn't there, so I've written to him. It was a cold, overcast day & I think that's where I got my chill, we had lunch, with Tim Edye & took him up with us but it was all rather boring, feeble polo and very few people compared to the usual crowd, it is (or was) the event of the year. Perhaps it's just a sign of old age that one is always looking back & finding everything better "then".*

*On Sunday evening we went down to the lines to take part in "prayers for rain", as it had been raining on and off for several days I imagine it was more by way of thanksgiving. Four old saffron-robed priests led the coolies in prayers for Daddy & I & you three, the old men chanted & then everyone joined in with weird crescendos, I found it very moving in the lamplight with the rain pattering on the tin roof. I wish language wasn't such a barrier to understanding. Afterwards there was dancing & drumming by parties specially laid on, but I was already beginning to feel tired & ill so we didn't stay long. It would have been a wonderful occasion for a tape-recorder.*

*We bought Tim's binoculars very cheaply and it's wonderful to be able to see birds properly, it has opened up a new world to me and I could spend all day lying under the rubber tree just watching the Orioles, green pigeon & various other birds who visit it.*

*John Lampitt left yesterday, we shall miss him very much, he's taking "The Rings" back with him for you...*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Friday 22nd February

*My dear Alan,*

*A nice long cheerful letter from you which bucked us up no end, I had had a depressing week, not being very well and then having to watch my poor old cat die and also being worried about the money not getting home. However I feel better now and have heard from the bank and got over the first misery that an animal's death always inflicts. We will wire the next lot of money home so that it'll get there earlier in the month...*

*Here I'm fighting against the lethargy that the beginning of the hot weather brings, the air is like milk and full of the scent of lime blossom, mimosa and sap generally (what a horrid ending to a sentence that started so well!) Spring isn't at all reviving, in fact it sits like a stone on ones forehead, but the birds are beautiful and very excited and now that we have bought Tim Edyes binoculars I can watch them much better. I watched a pair of orioles displaying in the rubber tree yesterday, fanning their golden tails in the most enchanting way, but now we long for a telescopic lens – so one's "needs" are never ending.*

*I don't seem to have done much since last writing. We went up the river on Sunday with one or two of the young lads but didn't fish, before leaving we took the dogs for a walk in the tea and Daddy saw a tiger – I was looking the other way needless to say, but very intrepidly (and in my case petrified) went into the tea after it. However it was lying low and I was rather glad frankly.*

*I've taken up my study of Assamese again and am starting lessons with the wife of our assistant<sup>305</sup> next week, have thought of going to live in an Assamese house for a month and Daddy surprisingly hasn't squashed the idea, it is the only way to learn I'm sure.*

*I've been doing quite a lot of history reading too, finishing Fisher as Anne and I stopped with a bang at the end of the Thirty Years War, and also Assamese history. It is annoying that here where I have the time to study, I can't get hold of any books. My Family Planning has also been frustrated for various reasons, one has to be violently dedicated and obsessed like Florence Nightingale to make any headway in this country, also rich, influential and unmarried!*

*I'm glad you are able to slack off a little in your work, I think your plans for a year's travel and then a social science course are excellent, though it means that we shan't see you when we come home next year which is rather an awful thought. Unless we come home in the autumn for a winter leave which we are seriously thinking of doing. I want to be home to see Anne started on her course which will be in September. Anyway you must make your plans as you think best and go for guidance to your friends and tutors because obviously they're much more in a position to help you.*

*I agree with Father Huddleston<sup>306</sup> of course, but alas and alack the spirit that took missionaries to difficult and dangerous corners of the world was so often militant, intolerant and arrogant that the good that they did was cancelled out. It would be an interesting subject for study actually, missionary work in India or Africa, and its exact impact for good or bad. The Jesuits wrote vastly as far back as Akbar's day & as they were always the first on the scene everywhere it would be fascinating. Another subject that intrigues me is the East India Co. but I shall have to leave all these studies till I get home & can ransack the India Office Files.*

*Wonder how Roseberry has fared? Granny just said she "liked" it but I hope the critics are more enthusiastic. We have a terrible week-end ahead, polo match, cricket match and a party at the Leethams all of which I hate the thought of! Ah well theres always Monday to look forward to. Keep well, are you drinking your Guinness? Much love – Mummy*

Letter from Donald Macfarlane to the General Manager<sup>307</sup>

Cherideo Purbut Tea Estate

23rd February, 1963

Dear Simpson,

You ask for my opinion on the specimen form the Board wish to introduce for reports by Managers on their Assistants. I have several reasons why I think this system inadequate.

(1) A Manager might feel bound to give (a) grading in most of the categories mentioned, and yet the Assistant might not, in any true respect, be first class. i.e. (a) for punctuality and energy, (a) unusually intelligent (a) writes a good letter (a) high standard Assamese (a) a good mixer. Yet this same, intelligent, punctual, popular man may be mercurial, insubordinate, arrogant, superficial etc.

(2) From the above it follows that no true assessment will emerge. What of the qualities that really count – solid, painstaking work, patience and cheerfulness over dully unrewarding jobs, a courteous and sympathetic approach to labour and staff, ability to be calm and resourceful in a crisis? A man who is between (b) and (c) category according to the form may possess all these qualities. By the way a man graded all (a) would not be in tea at all!

(3) The form suggests that there is only one type of "good" Assistant, but I disagree absolutely. This type of questionnaire is good enough for parlour games, but it is not good enough when a man's character is in question or his career at stake.

(4) Whilst from an interview all qualities cannot be ascertained, a lot of them can be, such as, letter writing, intelligence, knowledge etc.

Finally I make the observation that a Manager should be able to assess an Assistant's ability, and expressing his views in a few clear sentences.

Yours sincerely, Sd: D.K. Macfarlane, Manager

25 Feb 1963 Private and Confidential

Report on Mr. D. K. Macfarlane, Manager, Cherideo Purbut T.E. for the year ended 31st December, 1962.

There have been considerable improvements on Cherideo Purbut under Mr. Macfarlane and although, of recent months, he has improved, he was for the greater part of last year extremely slow in carrying out orders, and appeared loathe to make an attempt.

I had long talks with him, since when I have observed a change, and from now on, I am expecting bigger and better results from Mr. Macfarlane.

The competition bug has, I think, been consumed by him, and I will be surprised if another considerable improvement is not obvious by the end of the year.

Nazira 21.2.63 [signed J.E. Simpson, General Manager]

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 2nd 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter with the cuttings and the crocus which is taking a place of honour on the mantelpiece. I have written to Robert, all the reviews were marvellous (though of course you and I could do better!) and let's hope he will make a nice lot of money, though it seems a terrible price. Thank you for the anniversary wishes too, I must say it doesn't feel like 22 years and yet in other ways I can't remember a time when I wasn't married. We bought a bottle of champagne, had a long look at it, and then sent it back – it was Rs 72. Our only celebration was to take the dogs out tiger hunting after dinner, a beautiful moonlight night but no tigers.*

*Theres a lot of activity in the hills just now, they say the Chinese are arming the Nagas which is just the sort of thing they would do, in fact it would be difficult to tell some of the*



*fair Nagas from Chinese so we shall probably have them popping down that way next time. I used to think Assam such a quiet, uneventful place, it seems to be bristling with warlike possibilities now. Such a pity as it stops all our expeditions up the river and the promises of visits to Naga villages.*

*Our week-end was well and truly lost, we seemed to spend most of it batting backwards and forwards to polo matches, cricket matches and parties, none of which we wanted to go to. Daddy played cricket on Sunday, only kept wicket but was one large bruise afterwards, all the balls he didn't catch I suppose. I wasn't there, having accepted an invitation to watch the opening of the Sibsagar Commercial College. As we didn't get back from a party till 2.30 the night before I didn't really enjoy the Assamese speeches as much as usual, more so because we were sitting in the boiling hot sun for several hours listening to them. The Governor of Madras was opening the school, a minute little man who kept nearly falling off the dais in his speech, his A.D.C. had to haul him from the microphone wires.*

*I have taken up my Assamese studies again and am writing a grammar for myself which takes hours and hours but is quite amusing. The Moguls are arriving next week I hope and the Family Planning programme is at last under way but what the betting the Nagas and or Chinese will arrive to disrupt my little plans. It's getting quite hot as I think I remarked in my last and I should really be running up little summer dresses but the thought appals me.*

*I haven't heard from Granny since my sharp letter, not even about Robert, so violent um[brage] was obviously taken but really it's so peaceful not getting her letters.*

*I think you're probably right not to pick yourself and all your files up and go home for Easter but I hope you will at least spend your week-ends walking or boating.*

*Wonder if you saw Fiona who was in London I believe, why I can't imagine. Hope F & A managed to come down, they're obviously lonely poor dears. Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 10th March 1963

*Have you read the B.Gita yet? Was amused to see the Kama Sutra was a "classic" & best seller at home, it'll be a school book next!*

*My dear Alan,*

*A long long postal holiday, so this will be late I'm afraid. It is "Holi" the big spring fertility festival and it has brought the rain as it usually does (indeed has to, if the gods are good & thoughtful). We've had two days of lovely grey skies and the beautiful drip of drops into the drains. My garden is sighing audibly with relief, the dust on the roads has settled, and we have a fire again in the evenings. The tea bushes have broken out into a pale green sweat, the hills are brilliant blue & the only person who isn't happy is Ting<sup>308</sup> who sits in damp huddles in corners of his run, not catching a chill I hope. He won't stay out of the rain but I'm determined to try to bring him up tough so that he won't collapse, with pneumonia as all the others did.*

*We've had a quiet week-end, chiefly because its wild on the roads with drunken youths likely to spray one with red water or hurl bricks through the windows. We've had two fairly drunken parties coming up to dance for us, a rather attractive dance in which they all carry a pair of sticks which they click against each other's in a complicated and varying pattern. Perhaps our last year we'll be able to have a tape recorder & a Cine to collect all these dances – and give toothy talks on Telly like that dreary French couple?*



Dance party at Cherideo



*We've both been worried & upset by a flagrant case of police bullying & corruption against one of the labour. He lost his wife in childbirth & was run in for murder, but the*

*police say they will squash the case for Rs 500. He is innocent, very poor, & helpless because whatever he does the police will "get" him with false witnesses & rigged evidence. I've been busy composing letters to the papers but corruption is so widespread that nobody will speak up against it. I feel so maddened I want to burst, but without money & influence one can do nothing. As Daddy says, if he gets on the wrong side of the police they will bring cases against him at every turn, but not only that will take it out of the garden as a whole. He is prepared to risk that but the man himself is too scared & says he'd rather pay – talk about lighting candles instead of moaning about the darkness, it needs a vast great spotlight to illuminate the Indian scene. They are loathed by everyone & the result the corruption & bribery that are corroding every aspect of life – but only undemocratic means will get rid of it – legislation is useless considering half the legislators bribed themselves into office. Ah well, the arms I bear are far too brittle.*

*The Family Planning lady came to see me the other day, and we're starting a campaign as soon as she can fit me into her programme. She is an Indian, a Miss Kaisi, rather remarkable to find an Indian spinster doing this kind of work. She is very intense & dedicated & says she will try & get other Memsahibs to take part in this work – imagine how popular I'm going to be!*

*I'm getting the "Moguls" on Sunday, so after 5 months some of my little schemes are at last materialising. Just watch the Chinese appearing on the scene again, though it looks as if Malaya is going to be their next target....*

*I think of you often, in the last stretch of your vast project – are you revising yet? What about a couple of weeks in the Hebrides at the end of the ordeal you should see what the prospect of buying a croft or two is when we retire. Daddy wants to spend his time & energies on the young when he retires, and we dream of a place we could fill with the displaced & dispossessed – & our own grandchildren of course. I wonder if the reality would be too exhausting, remembering my palpitations just coping for us! We both send our love & thoughts, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 22nd 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter and for having the girls, who will have come and gone by now. "Oh to be in England..." although Richard says you are having a wet spring but this is the time of year I feel most homesick, remembering the daffodils and cuckoos and curlews and moss, everything wet and soft and gentle, not that it isn't beautiful here but in a hot hard way that soon wears one out. We did have some rain but now its glaring and very warm again, however it isn't bothering me much as I have my Moghuls at last. They turn out to be five volumes of the travels of a certain Peter Mundy in the seventeenth century<sup>309</sup>, only one of which deals with India, but all of which are quite fascinating, have you read any of them? As well there are several other history books which I have started to summarise and am already lost in another world, the India of the first traders, and a shocking lot they were, though brave enough. I don't know whether I will ever write any of it up, or what exactly to choose, if I did write about the Moghuls it would be as seen through the eyes of contemporary travellers, otherwise the whole subject is so vast that I would have to take to my bed like F. Nightingale. I think a Woodham-Smithish book called "The Great Greed" on the colonising of India might be interesting, anyway it is all going to keep me happily occupied for years.*

*I wonder if you could find out if the Hakluyt Society is still going, and if you have time in the vac. perhaps you could browse through old bookshops and see if you can find anything relevant to the early colonisation, Portuguese, Dutch or French as well as the East India Company. I'm particularly anxious to read the descriptions of the Jesuits at the court of*

*Akbar, and the travels of Ralph Fitch, and a book called "English Factories". No hurry for any of these as I have enough to keep me going for months and months, but while you are in Oxford you might be able to find out if these books are still available. My brain is so rusty that I find myself absolutely whacked after a couple of hours reading, I'm taking your tip and making notes on my typewriter which is a great help in remembering. I'm also plodding on with my Assamese and got Mrs Barua the assistant's wife to come up yesterday morning but she is reduced to helpless giggles most of the time and isn't much help. She is your age, was married off at eighteen to someone she had only seen once, poor girl it's a bit dismal for her.*

*Daddy and the committee voted me librarian at their meeting on Monday so that is another chore, there are 130 books missing after the last tenancy so I could hardly do worse but it's a thankless business as everyone moans and wants to read light cheerful romantic books but nobody seems to write them these days. I was tempted to send for Roseberry but at the price didn't dare. He seems to be selling well still and I got a letter from Granny saying "I hope you are duly impressed". Don't quite know what she meant by that, I'm inclined to read the worst into Granny these days! ...*

*Nearly at the end of the page and no news but there isn't really much these days, Daddy has started the factory and is preoccupied, the company is in the process of being run in for not implementing the Plantation Act,<sup>310</sup> serves them right, they have always done as little as they could possibly get away with in the way of housing etc, spending masses on managers bungalows while the coolies lived in hovels – & now they're going to have to pay for it – I hope! I'm sure I shall get Daddy the sack with my outspoken views, but he feels just the same now, if we only had some money we could blow the whole rotten edifice sky high.*

*I will send some more money at the beginning of the month, let us know when you expect your grant. Perhaps Richard could find you something in America to start you off? Don't think any further than June for the moment, doors always open.*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

[Attached are three Bodleian Library book order slips, on the back of which are noted the costs of subscriptions to the Hakluyt Society, some addresses in India, and about 30 book titles with prices against them, to do with early travels to India etc.]

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 30th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*A lovely long typewritten letter from you yesterday, thank you very much. I was most interested in what you had to say about corruption, which is very much on my mind these days (the paper never printed my letter, it was too strong I'm afraid, I ended by saying that corruption more than the Chinese was India's national enemy which at a time like this with the C's beginning to pant hot breath down our necks again was not very tactful, even though true). Of course you are right when you say that, as in Tudor England, the chief cause of this kind of society blackmail was the low salaries paid to men in responsible positions – and yet many of the chief offenders here are ministers who get quite reasonable pay – the chief Minister of Orissa owns the Air Line that got the contract for dropping supplies to the Indian army at the time of the invasion, but afterwards it was discovered that half the supplies had found their way into the black market. And so on and so on. But he's still the Chief Minister although the Press have published the allegations against him, even if they're not true fancy allowing the possibility of such a situation.*

*As you say it takes years to clean this sort of Augean stable but in Tudor times the whole world was run on those lines, England if I remember rightly being rather better off than the rest of Europe – it seems ridiculous that India in the twentieth century should still be in the*

same muddle when the answers have been found. As I said in my letter the only solution seems to be the setting up of special courts, sort of Star Chamber affairs, with arbitrary powers to strike and punish – but this is not democratic and India is determined to be a democracy in name even if in fact elections are rigged and illiterate masses bribed to vote for somebody's son in law, the somebody having himself been bribed [by] a more powerful somebody in an endless vicious cycle.

I have got to the part in my Indian history where Clive and Co. are in full swing in Bengal, they really got the hang of bribery, Clive got a yearly income of £30,000 from his Indian property and was still amazed at his own moderation when he only took a million home with him. It is fascinating if somewhat depressing reading, the debates that followed the discovery of what the East India Co. had been up to were full of wonderful speeches, "We are Spaniards in our lust for gold, and Dutch in our delicacy of obtaining it" Walpole shouted at one stage, even Clive himself entered the fray against the company, "They thought of nothing but the loaves and fishes" he said, the loaves and fishes being the £4,000,000 a year revenue the company was making, quite apart from private trading. Ah well, human nature never changes, but I don't think I could ever write a detached study of the British in India, I get so angry reading about it I feel my ears pounding, even though I know it isn't fair to judge them two hundred years later. I'm re-reading "A Passage to India"<sup>311</sup> for the third time and finding it as fascinating as ever, of all the books I wish I'd written that is the one I'd choose.

My own efforts to improve the humble lot have so far resulted in two meetings when the Family Planning lady has been down to talk to the labour and get the ball rolling, they seem to be interested and keen but they are very easily impressed always, the thing is to keep the good work going. I'm going down to the hospital several mornings a week to try and talk to the women when they're at their most impressionable, having babies or just having had them, also to try and improve the hospital a bit, I daresay the official lethargy will finally dampen my Florence Nightingale fire but Daddy is right behind me and everyone here adores him and will do anything for him.

We have just had the Catholic father staying for a couple of days, he is bringing the Bishop at the beginning of May which will be interesting, he is the most wonderful linguist (the Bishop) speaks fourteen languages fluently including things like Russian and Chinese and Naga. I admire these priests very much but they are odd in some respects, for instance they have no love or even feelings for animals, Father Harold was telling us that one of the fathers makes it a point of running over as many goats, dogs, chickens etc as he can and always comes back with an inventory, "Only five to-day" he says on a bad day. In Bengal there are some parts where the priests have to travel in bullock carts and there are a lot of tigers about so they always take two or three spare bullocks and when they see a tiger unloose one for him. They are also great supporters of bull-fighting. I suggested that these were all God's creatures but he just shrugged, I don't know what the official Catholic attitude is to animals but these Silesians are terrible.<sup>312</sup>

He was still sipping cups of tea yesterday when the family planning lady was due to arrive, I imagined a joint tea party, it would have been a little awkward to say the least of it as she is so keen she bubbles away all the time about birth control, I'm afraid Father Harold wouldn't have considered me a friend any longer.

It's getting very warm but still not hot enough for the air conditioner, as E.M. Forster puts it the air feels like a warm bath into which hotter water is continually trickling. I went up to Jorhat on Thursday to get a wedding present and some medicine for Dinah's eye and the roads are just a blinding haze of dust, I was exhausted when I got back – without the medicine too. I visited the new library there but the man with the key of the main room was away at the bazaar, it is a most imposing building anyway.



*I have a meeting to go to this afternoon and another to-morrow, both at the hottest time of the day and both consisting of endless Assamese speeches. How I long for some of those rushing winds you describe, here if the wind rushes it also screams and knocks down all one's plants and removes the rooves from the labour houses (roofs?). I loved that poem of Cummings, please send me some more, his poem "My Father Moves" is one of my favourites in the Faber book.*

*I have told the bank to put £30 into your account for April, I can't think how you were planning to live on £2 a week? I don't want you to have to worry more than possible about money now, and also you must eat nourishing food and will need a few clothes. Yes do do a post graduate study on how the Tudors coped with the problems of poverty and food and then come out here and tell someone. Daddy says he gave your passport to you, if you can't find it you will have to report its loss, but it isn't very difficult to get a new one. We have your birth certificate.*

*With much love from us both, Mummy*

2nd April 1963 [letter from General Manager to London]

I have arranged that during my absence in the U.K., Mr. Macfarlane will visit Nazira office every Tuesday for the signing of Board letters and whilst there discuss with Mr. Sawtell any important points which may arise.

Mr Macfarlane would also be requested to keep an eye on nearby gardens and where possible to satisfy himself that what was being done was in accordance with my Circulars on all subjects.

I would suggest that Mr. Macfarlane be paid an additional sum of Rs. 400/- per month in cash from Nazira whilst carrying out these duties and would appreciate the Board's agreement in this respect.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, April 8th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*We're sitting in front of a fire with Brahms on the gramophone, nothing could be cosier or less like April, this odd weather will doubtless have to be "paid for" later but at the moment it's wonderful. I'm sorry spring is not working its magic on you, one feels terribly restless when young at the passing seasons and youth flying past and so on and never seems able to enjoy things without the desire to "share" which spoils a lot of the time. Still its rather a delicious sadness. I'm waiting to hear from Fiona who was starving in a garret according to Granny but I hope is back by now.*

*I've had a peculiar week, going to polo matches and Assamese meetings and not quite knowing where my place is. On Sunday I went to the opening of a new hall to a college near here, it had been presented at the cost of Rs 15,000 by the widow of an Excise Inspector, nobody seemed to question how he had managed to get hold of that sort of money, his widow was a poor dazed little lady who couldnt even read. The meeting was presided over by a very charming woman, headmistress of a school in Jorhat, there is a new school being started there and they are looking for English teachers throughout. I wish I was just a little nearer, it's just the sort of thing I'd like to do, start a model school on proper lines and train some young Assamese girls.*

*I have been going down to give lessons to the boys and girls of class ten at the local high school, they are supposed to be taking their Matric next year and the boys are huge moustachioed specimens some of whom look about 30 but the poor darlings are trying to read Richard Steele<sup>313</sup> when they can't put together a simple grammatical sentence. I set them some work to do yesterday and got some extraordinary essays back, "After eating, drink*



*ink he slept and finished all his works. He descended from the ship and against with the captain, he desired to take his fat under the captain of the ship". What is one to do, and where start? Of course they shouldn't be faced with Steele to start with, all frightfully obtuse and archaic English, I don't know if I shall be able to help them but they are gratifyingly keen at the moment, expect the novelty will soon wear off but I'm learning lots myself. I must say too there is a certain charming surprise about someone drinking ink and taking his fat, much more amusing than the ponderous original essay about Alexander Selkirk.*

*I had a very nice letter from my agent yesterday, they are terribly charming people, he said I was not to be discouraged by the publisher not wanting the background, he had liked it and hoped I would write more children's books and would like to see me about them when I come home – all this gratifying correspondence is owing to you of course. The trouble is I don't really like writing for children, it is extremely difficult to work within a tight vocabulary and yet not be boring, makes one realise what marvels books like Alice in Wonderland are. I heard from the Hakluyt, an Assamese friend who is a member of the British council has got a book for me so I am busy for another few weeks.*

*We interrupted this high minded programme on Monday by going to a polo match at Moran, had lunch with the Rosses first and then watched horses for hours, very boring though I met rather a nice woman who has just come out and is keenly reading Assamese history, she lives at Dibrugarh though so I shall hardly ever see her, it usually happens that way.*

*This is the next day, two inches of rain in the night and it is still pouring down, we're bound to have floods, millions of mushrooms at the moment. Also a touch of rheumatism for the first time, funny how one thinks these ageing complaints will miss one. I'm supposed to be going to another meeting to-day but don't know if I shall get there in this weather.*

*It's the big spring festival of Assam next week so I hope the poor things will get some sun for it, they put orchids in their hair and dance and drum and look so pretty and gay.*

*Did I tell you that the professor who was helping me with my folk stories, last week died of a heart attack – it is slightly ominous the way each time I get in touch with someone he dies shortly afterwards, i.e. Verrier Elwin.<sup>314</sup> This man is going to be a big loss, we had all sorts of interesting help from him.*

*Must prepare some sort of speech for this meeting – it gets a bit easier each time but I still don't enjoy it.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, April 11th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*No letter this week, but don't think I'm complaining, I shan't expect you to write more than once a fortnight now as I know you will have a vast amount of reading and writing to do. I hope you won't have to resort to pep pills, more important to see you to sleep properly...*

*Such a beautiful day here after a night of almost continuous rain, cobalt blue hills and trees every shade of green and glittering deliciously, the tennis lawn which I had despaired of is suddenly green too.*

*We had a wedding last week end, one of the young lads from Seleng who was a friend of the girls, Daddy got out of going to the church which was at Jorhat and arrived in time for the reception. A nice young couple, cheerful and sensible with every prospect of being happy I think, though that district has a bad record of broken marriages. I scrounged hats and gloves and quite enjoyed it all, it got me out of attending the Nazira "spree" anyway which was an all-day affair and dreadfully dull.*

*I have been spending most of my mornings down at the hospital, and after ten days have persuaded them to keep the doors shut and the flies out which I suppose could be termed progress.*

*Not much headway with Family Planning though, I talk to the women and they agree that they don't want any more children and then they go home and their crones of mothers in law get at them and they capsize. The Doctor Babu doesn't help, he is a terror and they're all scared stiff of him so I try to evade him and he takes offence – can see myself getting caught up in endless complications and wonder if the result is going to be worth it, I have a feeling that compulsory sterilisation is the only answer here but that is "undemocratic". Anyway I might save a handful of unwanted children arriving and I suppose that is something.*

*In the afternoons I bury myself with the Moghuls, actually I haven't really got to them yet as I'm having to get a picture of Indian history so as to put them into context. It is fascinating but takes a lot of sorting out; a typical sentence culled at random "He captured Aligarh at the end of August, causing Perron to retire from Scinias service, and marching from Cawnpore captured Delhi, made a treaty with the raja of Bharatpur and finally vanquished Scindias remaining forces at Lawarie in Alwar State". The names alone produce a sort of miasma of misunderstanding, and it would take a great deal of effort to make this sort of thing interesting to the General Reader.*

*In my spare time I'm reading "the Great Hunger" which is good but I don't like it so much as her other books. I think she has done too much research and the book is one long quotation which tends to become irritating. The facts are appalling of course, one wonders why so much fuss was made about the Black Hole of Calcutta when the Irish landlords forced their wretched tenants to put up with far worse conditions, or at any rate for longer. I'm now librarian which is how I managed to get hold of it.*

*Have you read the Bishop of Woolwich's book?<sup>315</sup> Although I'm sure it is sensible and possibly true, I don't see how he can go on calling himself a bishop and the church really should be firm enough to say so. He doesn't even subscribe to the beliefs of the creed let alone the 39 articles.*

*On my way to the wedding I called in to see a historian friend (Assamese) who lives in a mud hut surrounded by mounds of wonderful books, he spends everything he has (precious little) on them & his one idea is to get home to the reference library of the B.M. Such a pity all that talent & enthusiasm can't be used, one longs to help.*

*I hope the money arrived safely, let us know in good time if you want more, the difficulties the Reserve Bank are putting in one's way these days make us feel we shall have to think of packing up, we have now had to send our passports back to 1936 in order to remit money home. Met Roger May[o] at the wedding, madder than ever & still searching for a Parsee bride.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, May 9th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Ten o'clock of a hot May morning, I've already been for a long walk with the dogs, had two cold showers and drunk six glasses of water and feel the day ought to be nearing its end instead of just beginning. I should be going to the hospital now but have a tummy upset so am giving it a miss. My work there has achieved some springs on the doors so that the flies are kept out, and five women have been sterilised so I feel I am achieving something though it's only a drop in the ocean of need.*

*We had the Catholic Bishop and Father Harold staying over the weekend and as usual they made me feel terribly guilty. The bishop is sixty and has been out here for over forty*

*years, he was up at five every morning, out all day in the villages, and kept us up talking till midnight every night – we were worn out but his fund of energy seemed inexhaustible. Needless to say he was an absolute pet. If only I could quiet my reason and accept the whole bag of tricks I would be a Catholic to-morrow, just on the example of the priests.*

*They were telling us that there were near famine conditions round Dibrugarh, that they and Oxfam had done what they could to supply food and the government nothing – this was due to the floods last year, and government would not even advance them money to buy seed although the central govt. has given a substantial amount for flood relief. It has all gone into the usual pockets I suppose, sometimes I feel I can't bear this place any more it is so wickedly corrupt.*

*I have been writing round about getting you a job, no answers so far but I am told there would be no difficulty in your getting a lecturer's post at Gauhati University if all else fails, the Vice Chancellor is an Englishman whom I hope to see soon as I'm planning to go to an Assamese wedding if I can face the bus trip to Gauhati. We shall be able to give a bit of help with your passage out as we are being given new cars by the company which means we can sell our old one, won't get much for it but will probably be about £100 to the good.*

*Apart from the Bish's visit this hasn't been a very eventful week, the tea is piling up so Daddy is more and more involved in the factory and my daily round is much the same. I am half way through Sir Thomas Roe (I see his letters are in the Bodleian) and finding him great fun, he came to India when the position of the factors at Surat was very precarious, and his job for three years was to follow the Moghul Emperor Jehangir around trying to get him to sign some definite contract to protect the English from the Portuguese and the Indian customs officials. He was determined to impress everyone with the dignity of his position, which was pretty hard going as to the Moghuls and in fact Indians generally, traders were only one class above servants and though they were all polite nobody had any intention of taking him seriously. It is all so amusing one is inclined to forget how brave these lone Englishmen were, trekking across India and braving fevers and famines, and then living in Oriental courts so magnificently barbarous that every day must have been a hazard. Roe, who had been a friend of Sir W. Raleigh, had to live in "a house of mud" and the only presents he got were "whyld hogge" though the whole place was dripping in jewels and gold.*

*I have left Ting [monkey] out, and he rampages round, chasing the chickens and worrying Miranda (the deer) who will trample him to bits if he isn't careful but I feel he must be given the chance of a gay life even if it's a short one.*

*Hope you aren't getting nerves & the revision isn't proving too vast, take some tranquillisers if you feel you need them, my little mauve heart-shaped pills are wonderful for about 2 hours & would be just the thing for an interview but you'd better see what effect they have on you first! They make me feel tall, fair & elegant & completely confident though this might be dangerous in an exam! When exactly do you "sit"?*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

Around this time, there are letters in the Assam Tea Company Records about the erosion of salaries - one from Bill Beattie, a young Assistant Manager, another from Robert Higham, a senior Manager.

To J.R. Simpson, Esq, General Manager, Assam Company Ltd., Nazira.

Khoomtaie T.E.

Moran P.O.

10.5.63

Dear Sir,

With all due respect I detail below for you information a few unavoidable basic facts relating to the present Company salary and remuneration affecting myself. ...

With the present taxation and the coming car scheme the total reduction in my gross salary compared with March 1963 will be Rs. 410 appxo. .... Income tax has doubled but no relief in the way of pay increased or levelling out of nett salaries. ... Personally and frankly speaking I like this work and being married am much happier, but there seems little point or advantage in remaining out here when I find that all I have left after deducting the cost of necessities and normal expenses conducive to a moderately economical existence is a bare Rs. 50/-

Gross Salary: Rs. 1,100

Income Tax - Rs. 200 appxo

Monthly Bazar - 120 appxo

Club Bills (married) - 200 appxo

Kamakhya Stores (Moranhat) - 100 appxo

Garden Dukan Bills - 150 appxo

Life Assurance, Stationery milk, Dobie etc - 90 appxo

Cook - 90 appxo

Car Tax Payment on new scheme and running costs - 100 appxo.

Total - Rs. 1050 appxo.

I would be very grateful to hear your views and have your advice on this matter and I apologise if I have been a bit long-winded about it.

Yours faithfully

sd W.M. Beattie

To: The General Manager,  
The Assam Co. Ltd.  
Nazira

Suntok T.E.,  
Nazira P.O.  
Assam  
20th May 1963

Covenanted Staff: Terms of Service

Dear Sir,

Since the last Indian Budget, the Income Tax I pay on my month's salary has increased by about Rs 200 per month. Under the present terms of service, and assuming Income Tax continues at its present rate, this means that in my remaining five years' service with the Company my next salary will never again reach its pre-budget figure.

In recent years it has become increasingly difficult to live out here on our present salaries; since the last Budget it is virtually impossible to do so. A few years ago it was officially stated by the I.T.A. (also in the U.K.C.A. "Monthly Review") in connection with obtaining educational grants from local authorities in U.K., that a salary of £1,000 a year in India was equal to one of only £490 a year in the U.K. Since the last Budget this must have dropped to £400 or less for each £1,000 in India. On this basis I am now only earning the same as a man getting £20 a week in the U.K. This is quite ridiculous in view of the great responsibilities of a Manager, and the many disadvantages of living out here – lack of amenities, divided families etc. Our main reason for being out here is to earn sufficient to keep our families in reasonable comfort, and to save enough to retire comfortably. At the moment this is impossible, and I feel it is time for the Board to make immediate and far

reaching improvements in our terms of service. I would therefore like to make the following suggestions, and would be grateful if you would forward them to the Board.

(1) We should have a guaranteed net salary, irrespective of any future increases in Income Tax.

(2) There should be a substantial increase in our basic salary.

(3) Commission should be abolished. A fair average should be taken and added to our basic salaries.

(4) All allowances as such should be abolished and an equal amount added to our basic salaries.

(5) Annual increments should be increased, the increases arranged on a sliding scale so that they increase in proportion to seniority (or basic salary)

(6) Pensions should be increased again, to at least £1200 a year after 30 years' service. In view of the very healthy state of the Pension Fund this could probably be done without any cost to the Company, and it would be some incentive to us to remain with the Company.

(7) Our personal contributions to the old Pension Fund, which were taken over by the Company when the new Pension Fund was started, should now be transferred to members' contributions of the Provident Fund. This also would not cost the Company anything. It would make little or no difference to the Pension Fund, but in many cases it would make an appreciable difference to an individual's Provident Fund.

(8) During the Chairman's last visit, he and Mr Gilbert told several people that they hoped to increase the Educational Grant, but this had not yet been done. I understand several other companies have already increased their Grants, and I suggest ours is increased as quickly as possible, to take effect from January 1st 1963. This is an amenity which helps those most in need of help.

(9) It would help us all if our cooks were paid by the Company.

(10) Bungalows should be much improved. They should be fully furnished, including crockery, cutlery, linen etc. This would help juniors mostly of course.

(11) The Company should pay the whole of the air freight (up to a reasonable maximum amount) for an individual's cold storage and "dry" stores from Calcutta.

(12) Intermediate passages should be given for wives to visit children in U.K., or for the children to visit India (as desired by the individual) once during a tour. This should apply even to a 21 month tour.

Items 2,3,4 and 7 would result in a big increase in our Provident Fund, which would benefit everyone and be an incentive to remain in the Company. Items 2 and 5 would result in our paying more tax, but our basic salary would also increase. In case any of the above is considered unreasonable, I would like to make it clear that each item is already being given by at least one other company.

Regarding the new Car Scheme, while welcoming it as a big step forward which will benefit more people, I regret that the senior managers who would be retiring before they would normally require a new car, are going to lose by it. For instance I estimate I will lose about Rs 8,000 in my remaining five years, compared with the previous scheme, Rs 300 a month T.A.

I feel you must be well aware of the urgency for the early implementation of vastly improved terms of service, and anything you can do towards it will be greatly appreciated by us all. At the moment it is just not an economical proposition to remain out here.

Yours faithfully,  
R. Higham [sig.]

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, May 17th 1963

My dear Alan,

...There seems to have been a hitch over my letters as Fiona also mentioned not hearing, but I write every week without fail, the only entries in my diary are "Wrote Alan" etc. I haven't had any replies to my enquiries about you here, but nobody ever answers letters for months in Assam. I hope to go to Shillong on June 2nd and will go and see Dr Verrier Elwin then, and also the Vice Principal of Gauhati University. You will probably have changed all your ideas by now, but never mind, can always cancel things. The only snag might be that we will have thrown in the sponge ourselves, we wrote to the Board last week and said unless something was done about our salaries (which have just been lopped by Rs 600 a month due to tax and oddments) we would have no alternative but to resign. So we shall see what happens, I think they'll have to do something as everyone is complaining.

I feel a little depressed this morning after my visit to the hospital, my baby has measles and none of the women are interested in family planning – still it is bound to be a see saw affair and one must just press on hopefully. The Moghuls are more rewarding, I really feel I know Sir Thos Roe well and Jehangir and the lot of them, I will write an article when I've finished which I'll send to you and you can read it and see if you think "History Today" would be interested. I've had no reply to my letter to the Hakluyt Society yet but am still hoping, letters take such ages and red tape is more strangling now than even in the days of the Raj who introduced the stuff.

We've had a gay week which I find wearing, two dinner parties, one bridge day and a club night, the film "The Battle of the Sexes" was amusing in parts with Peter Sellers looking just like Richard and some nice views of Edinburgh but a bit disappointing. The bridge party was devastating, we played for six hours altogether and what with the heat and the cigarette smoke and the concentration I was speechless with tiredness when I got home and flopped into bed with cards flashing in front of my eyes. We played at the Lobbans, do you remember them, they always talk of an evening they spent in our bungalow when you played the guitar as being the happiest they had ever spent in tea! Margaret is now a mass of nerves and gave the impression of being drunk that day, her bridge was so peculiar it was embarrassing and I felt quite worried about her. She doesn't appear to have anything to worry about, it is so sad.

The best part of the day was the gramophone playing Pablo Cassals (?) and Beethoven's Cello Concerto, it is a lovely record, I wonder if you have it? Probably haven't had time (or money) for tapes, I go round asking everyone I meet if they have a tape recorder and I think I may have run one to earth, I long to hear you and the coffee cantata.

Assam is very beautiful now with the flowering trees out, pink and scarlet and purple and yellow, if only one didn't feel so dead tired all the time one would appreciate it more. My trip to Shillong should revive me, just to think of the smell of cool earth and pine trees is refreshing.

I hope you manage to get to the Cotswolds for a few days before the exam to get that peace and inspiration you need, this is the last big hurdle anyway, you really have had rather an orgy of exams this last few years, one forgets what it's like to dread things that much and to have a date hanging over you, but you seem to be being sensible & fatalistic about it. Don't forget to let us know when the exam is will you...

Lunchtime, roast beef & Yorkshire pudding, ug! What wouldn't I do for a salad & a Guinness!

Much love – Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, May 27th 1963

My dear Alan,

*You will be very near the Time now, if not already embarked on your ordeal – it sounds like labour the way I've put it and I expect it feels like it too but the relief when it is all over is so exquisite that its almost worth it. As far as we're concerned its of absolutely no importance what sort of degree you get or don't get, my only regret now is that we couldn't have let you have more money at Oxford so that you could have enjoyed the lighter side of life and not been worried about finances all the time, but there it is. We shant expect to hear from you till it's all over and you're home, you'll need to hire Pooley's lorry to get you back or perhaps Richard will be able to help.*

*I can't imagine that any of my doings will be of the least interest to you at the moment, I'm so cross that two of my letters went astray, one in which I sent ideas for jobs you could get here. I think a couple of months in a Kibbutz would be an excellent scheme, if you learnt fish rearing you would be able to give the chaps here a few tips, they have a sort of scheme at Sibsagar but it is very haphazard. I only hope the Chinese don't knock all our ideas on the head, they are making menacing gestures again but it's impossible to work out their reasoning.*

*I'm off to Shillong next Sunday 2nd June, and will be able to "pursue my enquiries" about you in between watching the four day Assamese wedding to which I've been invited. Is it too late for you to apply for a research grant I wonder, Dr Verrier Elwin has been very ill which is probably why he hasn't answered my letter.*

*I had a letter published in the Statesman last week about the burial mounds here, someone had written about them and I felt I had to put him right, but it has resulted in letters asking if I am a collector of old coins and would I like to swap any of my rare specimens, I only have one coin and I'm not sure of the date of it even, thats the trouble with getting into print, people think you know a lot more than you do.*

*Daddy has gone up to Dibrugarh to-day along with Jack Simpson and all the other managers, the company is being run in for not implementing the Plantation Act, a purely anti-Simpson move on the part of the government as he is terribly rude to all their representatives and they're out to get him. He kept a V.I.P. waiting about for hours the other day, someone from Delhi on Defence business and Jack treated him as if he was an office clerk (he thinks all Indians are Babus and treats them as such) and we hear the repercussions are at ministerial level! Poor Daddy, he has to go to Dibru' every day this week, it's a 2 and a half hour trip each way and he is going to be bored, frustrated and ashamed of the whole business.*

*We had the Sehmers and their two children over for the day yesterday, the boys (aged 4 and 3) are much improved but were fascinated by the monkey who hated them with a jealous hatred the minute he clapped eyes on them and spent the day trying to attack them while I pretended he was playing and suggested other diversions such as pouring water over my head, it was all a little exhausting.*

*I have finished Sir T. Roe and am on to Peter Mundy now, I was so sorry to leave Roe, I felt I'd travelled every inch of the way with him and was just as worried as he was when each new shipload of presents arrived and he didn't know what rubbish the company had sent or if he was going to be able to get it past the customs. I've never had an answer from the Hakluyt Society man in Delhi so will try at home to see if I can join.*

*My hospital work is fairly static now, but I think of F. Nightingale and take heart and I have had two more volunteers this week so thats something. A man got his hand caught in a C.T.C.<sup>316</sup> machine the other day, Daddy was standing nearby when it happened fortunately,*



*the machine jammed and they had to send for wrenches while the poor man just stood there being crushed, he is still in pain but was lucky that it wasn't his whole arm.*

*It is very beautiful now with all the flowering trees out, golden and pink and scarlet, I wish we had a colour film. I won't discuss plans with you in this letter, your mind will be occupied with getting through the next week or two, it's a great relief that Fiona has got through her interview but she and Granny seem to be fighting a lot, G. doesn't seem to realise that Fiona has grown up and must be allowed to lead her own life, even if it's a haywire one.*

*Our thoughts & prayers will be with you, I'm quite sure you have nothing to worry about but that isn't any comfort when one is already worried sick! Life does go on, with or without B.A. 's!*

*All our love – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Shillong, June 3rd 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm sitting in a little wooden hut looking out on green ridged hills very like the downs with big soft English clouds resting on them – 3,000 feet up at a place called Burrapani just below Shillong. There is a big hydro-electric project in the valley below me, the river is going to be dammed & there is to be a lake with gardens and pleasure steamers, a pity in a way as it looks so quiet & green now (except for the lorries and stone-crushers etc) but this place will provide half Assam with power so one mustn't be fuzzy about spoiling Nature.*

*The young man whose wedding I've come to attend is working here as an engineer, he lives in a government house on a terrace above me and I've been put in the Inspection Bungalow on my own. It is in the charge of a wonderful-looking Sikh with white hair & beard, about 10 ft tall with golden rosy cheeks & coal black eyes. I was a little dubious when handed into his charge at midnight last night & rather unnecessarily clanged to all the bolts of my windows & doors with the result that I nearly suffocated – now I've seen him by daylight I have more confidence & shall be quite happy to-night.*

*I had an exhausting trip up starting off at 5.30 a.m. & drove for 5 hours, thinking I would be met at Nowgong at 10 but the person who was picking me up didn't turn up till 3 p.m. I had quite a reasonable room in the Circuit House but it was fearfully hot and my warm water and runny butter very unappetising & I had brought nothing to read – serious omission that, only some ancient "Readers Digests" here but so far I have only wanted to sit & drowse and enjoy the fact that I'm not sweating. Eventually at 5 p.m. we set off on the last lap for Shillong, Barua (our Assamese assistant) driving & every inch of space taken up by sari-clad figures and children all nattering in Assamese & in the last stages of the trip vomiting in it! I felt terribly tired, dizzy & depressed when I finally arrived & was faced with crowds more, sat about for ages, feeling dead with hunger while people tried to make conversation to me – eventually got to bed – the latter being a board lightly covered with a hair mattress, but I slept pretty well all the same & feel much better this morning.*

*If I can be left to myself a good deal I shall enjoy walking & sleeping & living an absolutely unorganised existence for a few days, the wedding doesn't start till 5th and I'm not sure how long I shall stay after that, depends on whether I can get a lift back to Gauhati. I don't want to be away for too long as Daddy gets depressed, but sleeplessness, "tummies" and so on made me feel my nerves must be frayed to shreds.*

*I'm thinking of you all the time and wishing I could help in some way, but by this time the worst should be over I reckon. This place, the smell of the wooden floors & walls, the soft breeze & flowers & Khasi women in their hoods & cloaks, takes me back vividly to our early days in Shillong. 17 years ago to-day I sent you out of hospital here after your tonsils*

operation, & started having Anne, strange that I should be back & makes me have long sad thoughts of how I have changed since then when I was full of bright dreams for you all – now I realise how little we have managed to accomplish & how much of the sparkle seems to have gone out of life too. Enough dreary reminiscing it must be those "Readers Digests" with their hearty advice to the Over Forties, the most depressing thing about middle age is that your feelings all seem to be carbon copies, nothing quite fresh or authentic. All hormones according to the R.D.!

I think the car has come to collect me and take me to Shillong. I'm going to try to contact Dr Verrier Elwin while I'm here but it's a bit difficult without transport. Jack Simpson has suddenly been flown home,<sup>317</sup> he left yesterday, wild speculation as to why. He was due to go on leave in 6 weeks' time so it must be something pretty urgent for the Board to spend all that money on his passage. It gives us a talking point for a week or two anyway.

Nehru is coming here to open the new Brahmaputra bridge in a few days' time, hope that won't be a signal for the Chinese to cross same! I wish I had brought my books & typewriter here, it would have been a wonderful place to work, perhaps I'll be able to come back now I know about it.

I wonder what Anne will be doing to-day, she seems to have another underpaid overworked job.<sup>318</sup>

I do hope you'll have a couple of weeks of peace & good weather in the Lakes after you've finished, we'll discuss plans in due course, we shall be able to help a bit with your passage – a great deal depends on your finding your important papers! e.e. Cummings arrived safely & very quickly and I love it, wish I had him here. Actually, wish I had some paints too but I couldn't capture these humped monsters of hills, soft lazy monsters steaming away in the sun with red scratches down their sides.

The car has come & gone, really they are wonderfully vague these Assamese, they now say they will pick me up after lunch but that probably means nearer tea-time, never mind, forgetting time is the nicest part of a holiday. I've just had a talk with the magnificent Sikh who was a Subadar Major in the Punjabi Regt, he's now in charge of the labour force here, I've never seen a face that glows & glitters like his, cheeks, eyes, teeth, eyebrows all shining and twinkling. There is a lovely smell of curry coming out of the kitchen, I'm going to have it in a minute & then go into Shillong (I hope!) to buy a wedding present, already I feel the knots in my stomach loosening, if only there was a retreat like this somewhere nearer & we could get away every month what a difference it would make, its having your worries & frustrations around you all the time that is so un-nerving.

I won't mention money except to hope that you have enough to get you home, let us know eventually. Do hope you aren't too worn out, discouraged or generally got down by Events, this time last year it was Anne & I in a minor way but it all seems terribly unimportant now.

All our love & thoughts, Mummy

Another notebook exists which was initially used for notes on the Assamese language which Iris had taken with her to Shillong. Perhaps the lack of anything to read prompted her to begin using it to write an account of this experience.

Notebook: Burrapani 7.pm (June 1963)

The clouds and hills are turning burnt o[torn] except the far hills which are lavender. A big white moon is floating in a pale sky, faded blue like a washed-out cloth. A twilight breeze stirs the marigolds and the air is full of spices and voices and the last squeeks of baby birds in the roof. I have been for a walk down to the river, intending to commune with nature in the hills but finding myself stumbling through a shanty town of Nepalese stone workers – puddles and the smell of excreta & women in doorways picking lice out of each other's hair –

but gaiety too & grace. These people can't be ugly, the women squatting on piles of stones, slowly hammering and splitting, have a beautiful rhythmic rightness. Perhaps it is the utter relaxation of their postures, the beautiful copper arms unprotesting at the dreary & trivial job that fills their days, their bare toes gripping the stone with confidence and deep familiarity. This is what makes them so restful to watch. And the line of the bone about cheek & skull and the laughter that makes light of those terrible houses of old tin & bamboo to which they have to return at the end of their stony day. I sat below the dam & watched the river float by, gravy brown with purple shadows, & then as it got further away a vivid peacock green. The great humped hill across the water looked so like an animal I wanted to stroke it, run my fingers through its green fuzz and along its backbone – but I couldn't find a place to cross. The moon is now a bright silver & the sky has darkened about the faded clouds and its almost too dark to write.

I have had a peaceful day not going anywhere. I woke after a long night's deep sleep with a delicious feeling of well-being & tranquillity. There had been rain in the night & a breeze was blowing the blue curtains about my bed and there was nothing to do, nothing to order, nothing but tea to drink and pieces of sweet toast with slightly rancid butter on them to eat, deliciously reminiscent of dak bungalows & train meals.

I was interrupted by Mr Phukan who had come to pay a call. After a quick bath he joined me at breakfast and we talked about meditation and the need for becoming one with nature. Afterwards he made me sit up very straight in my chair and said some Theosophist prayers while I stared out into the bright garden and felt slightly foolish. I feel that essentially he is right, that the breakthrough to God, the Life Force, 'sakti' or what have you is a matter of winnowing away the unessential, the attachments and entanglements of everyday living, of becoming one with the life that is flowing through the world. But what about the pain & hunger, the thin ragged children I saw scouring the drains yesterday? According to him they are just paying for their past lives. "I send them my thoughts" he said loftily, and looked smug about it. Wouldn't it be better to go among them like the Bishop, offering humble service, instead of sitting & meditating in the place between the eyebrows where the god-fire burns. Both of these men have impressed me with their joyous certainty that they are right, but neither satisfies me completely with notion of his certainty. If Phukan would spend more time & money on his suffering countrymen, & the Bishop had a wider tolerance, how wonderful they would both be. I have been reading "The Plumed Serpent"<sup>319</sup> & find it fascinating, wonderful descriptions and so much that strikes home to this particular heart.

Yesterday I found myself in the middle of another strange conversation with a drunk little man called Deb who collared me in Shillong club & offered me a gin & mutton patties & a sort of cheerful & drivelling chivalry that was faintly touching. You felt he was the sort of man who everyone 'knew' about & avoided. And it made him mildly ecstatic to have someone sit with him for an hour.

We discussed Hinduism, history, his marriage and family life and when he found I was the lady who wrote for the Statesman he shouted to the bearers that I was more important than the Prime Minister, information that they received with stony calm. He had a lovely smile which lit up his tired bespectacled face and made one feel that there was a great deal of good beneath the swagger and effrontery.

Shillong is the same as ever & always makes me sad, perhaps because it reminds me of the beginning of my married life. It is shabby and faintly debauched but vital and fascinating, every sort of face and race drifting about it, the only 2 ugly people I saw were Europeans, a bald headed paunchy man with thin white legs the colour of fungus, and a fat woman with a red pointed nose and short skirts riding up above her thick streaky legs. She looked like a salami sausage bursting from its skinny skin. I was the 3rd ugly person around that day, how sad.

To-morrow the wedding starts so my peace is over and I will never get over the river and stroke my green monster.

The wedding was quite charming – a roomful of sari-ed women in gold & silks among whom I squatted in my black & white check & Woolworth pearls with my mushroom knees protruding, how ugly & graceless we are compared to Indian women who melt into their background like gold lizards.

Barua stood & 'clocked in' the bride, rather incongruously poised with a camera waiting for the auspicious moment. She shuffled in, a tiny, shy, silk clad figure. All we saw of her were her arms held out for the gold bracelets & rings, each finger painted with red stripes & weighted down with gold.

We were given tea & sweetmeats, & soon after curry and dal & dishes of cream with sugar, it was strange to see women who had been talking English one minute, scooping up their food with their fingers the next. Why strange I don't know.

In the evening I went to see Mrs Merchant, a charming, dumpy, woman with eyes like the dark centre of a flower, soft & thick & gold-glinting. We drank tea scented with lemon grass & her sister-in-law came in, a most beautiful Parsi girl with creamy skin & long waxy black hair, but hairy legs & broken toe nails. They live in a little house which looks as if they had moved in yesterday, tin trunks and book cases filled with rubbish & made of wooden crates & terrible pictures of daisies & doves.

This morning I went to have coffee with one of the other wives, a very noisy Madrassi lady who heaped chapattis, curried toast, sonji & stuffed capsicum on my plate and every time I stopped for breath shouted "Why aren't you eating? EAT" very fiercely. Various other wives joined us & a mass of children, all rather squalid but somehow relaxed & gay. There's a great deal to be said for the friendly, grubby, gossipy way these sort of women live, looking after each other's children, cooking greasy meals, uncluttered by possessions except for some photographs of their children & in this case the Virgin Mary. We talked of the price of food, our health, Family Planning (of course) & the price of food again.

I came back & slept & woke to the hammer of rain on the roof, my monster had disappeared into a dripping cloud & his fur turned grey & cold.

At 5 Mr Phukan came to take me to the reception, I sat in a chair in a howling draft under a tin-roofed pandal<sup>320</sup> for a long time while various disconsolate women crouched on the floor, an odd way of entertaining. Eventually we were taken into another tent and given tea and nuts & cake & cream. I met a woman with a face exactly like an English bridge-playing matron, it seemed odd to see her in a sari, she had been very beautiful, with a roman nose and magnificent flashing eyes, but run to fat. With her was her young sister who knew Fiona and was still beautiful, there is something so delicate & clear-cut about these faces, I never tire of looking at them. Now I am sitting listening to the wind in the darkness, feeling too full, waiting for the last stage of the wedding to-night.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, June 11th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*A letter from you just arrived, very calm and relaxed I'm glad to say, by now all will be Over – but not the wonderful weather I hope so you can have some really carefree summer days afterwards. I'm longing to hear what the papers were like, hope you'll send them out. Before I go any further, no I didn't get your letter about reading on the Ahoms, but 2 lovely books have just arrived, the "History of India" and "A Pearl to India". The former is exactly what I wanted to pull together the threads of my somewhat scattered knowledge, so far I've only read the Moghul chapters but intend to go right through it, it even mentions the Assam*

Co! Thank you very much for both, I shall consider them as my birthday present, so don't dream of sending anything else.

When I was in Shillong I rang up Dr Verrier Elwin the anthropologist in charge of N.E.F.A. (or rather advisor to the North East Frontier Agency). He was very nice and asked me to go & see him, but alas I couldn't without transport. He said he didn't think N.E.F.A. was much good to you as no Europeans are allowed passes, but gave me the name of someone who is in charge of a new research institute in the Garo Hills and said he thought this might offer you an opening. Anyway I'll try it. I saw a few days later that according to the local rag "Dr Verrier Elwin's philosophy for N.E.F.A. has failed & he'll soon be leaving". I was almost glad to see in yesterday's paper that 12 N.E.F.A. officials had been killed by the Daflas, one of the wildest tribes. Dr V.E. advocated a very careful approach, with emphasis on not disturbing the tribal pattern, but the Assam Govt. thinks it can charge in and order everyone about willy nilly.

I enjoyed my stay in Shillong very much, more for the peace, coolness and relaxations than for the wedding which was chaotic. They have no sense of time, or order or dignity at all – we got to the wedding house 2 hours late (11.30 p.m) & then waited another 2 hours while vague old ladies wove garlands, the bride wept exhaustedly (she had been starving for 2 days) & nobody told one what to do or introduced one to anyone so I just sat about rather self-consciously. At last we trooped out to where the bridegroom was sitting cross-legged in front of the sacred fire with 2 Brahmins on either side & after another  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour the bride composed herself sufficiently to appear. It could have been a beautiful & moving ceremony, as it consisted of the Brahmins chanting sacred Sanskrit verses (a most sonorous language) while the bridegroom threw oil on the fire, occasionally varying the proceedings by tying the couple together with sacred thread & getting them to walk round in circles. BUT the Brahmins were dressed in dirty shirts and old scarves & sat amidst a litter of wood, old tins, rice etc & it resembled nothing more than a Babus picnic.

They argued about the scriptures, lost the string, and could hardly be heard above the chatter & laughter of the audience. The bridegroom, who is a modern youth, sniggered & made faces & anyway could hardly see for the sacred smoke in his eyes & suddenly it was over & the Brahmins were wiping the vessels with dirty old newspaper & we went home, at 4.15 a.m.!

I'd had a long talk with the bridegrooms father the day before, he's a Theosophist and was explaining that the secret of happiness was union with the Life Force through meditation. I could understand that would be very satisfying, but asked him what was his explanation of pain & suffering. "Oh they are paying for sins of past life. We send them our thoughts" he said loftily – and in spite of his so called disinterest in worldly things he had arranged for his son to marry one of the richest contractor's daughter's and had loaded her with gold presents while the people in his district had been reported starving. I thought of the Bishop and his compassionate humility & was slightly sickened. There must be somewhere a religion that combines service with wide tolerance, Buddhism perhaps, but I've never seen this in action. Or Quakers? I must learn more about them.

I had to leave for the plains 2 hours after getting back from Shillong & a very tiring journey it was with a superintendent of Police, his wife, driver, ayah & four children, it poured with rain all the way & we didn't reach Jorhat till midnight so I slept in his spare room bed & Daddy met me at the club at mid-day. Alas I picked up a heavy cold & sore throat & have been in & out of bed for the last couple of days, feeling physically low but mentally much refreshed. Long letters from both girls to-day ecstatic about the weather, it makes me very homesick as Assam is so hot & damp one cannot enjoy its exceeding beauty properly.

*Jack Simpson is still at home & the rumours about him get wilder hourly but I daresay he'll be back and everything return to normal very soon.*

*Have a good clear out of all your papers & see if you can find your passport & birth certificate, if not I'll get a copy of the latter from Shillong. We'll be able to help you with your fare to Israel & on here, so hope you'll carry on with the Scheme – unless you get a 1st & then will you stay on at Oxford?...*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, June 19th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*I hope by this time you will be a man of infinite leisure with nothing to do but go through your possessions (says she hopefully). Alas the wonderful weather seems to have just lasted through your exam and now broken as it did last year, never mind if you have Penny with you I expect the weather will be of little consequence. Anne said she might be coming up also Felicity and Fiona and Rosemarie so that hunt for Men will be on again as the Lake District never seems to be able to produce anything new in that line.*

*I'm enclosing a letter I got from this place I wrote to, I will leave it to you to decide if you want to follow it up. Dehra Dun is certainly a delightful place and as she says there are lots of schools there where you could probably get fixed up but of course its rather a long way from here. Perhaps you have changed your mind about the whole tour? But I'm pressing on regardless, the only snag is that we may not be here by then ourselves.*

*We have decided to resign at the end of the year if they don't do something drastic about our terms, this struggling on against financial odds, wearing climate, indifferent health (mine out here) and the dreadfully callous attitude of the people in charge is getting us both down. We should have to work for three years at home until we get our pension but both feel we'd be happier and healthier and more satisfied living on bread and cheese (and Guinness) than banging our heads endlessly against the rocks of indifference, corruption and complacency which is our lot here.*

*As I get older too I find I am physically worn down by the suffering of people and animals all around me, and can seem to do nothing to alleviate any of it as everything needs money of which we never have any to spare. I could continue my study of the Moghuls just as well at home, better in fact as books are easier to get, of course there are lots of things I would miss and I'd carry a million regrets for all I have left undone, but in this particular sphere it is almost impossible to do anything I've discovered.*

*Anyway we should know quite soon, Jack Simpson has returned and we shall find out from him what he achieved with the Board at home, it will probably be vague promises of "looking into" things and in that case we shall take the plunge. Even if we do decide to retire, though, you could still carry on with your tour, spending less time in India perhaps and concentrating on the cities where the need is greatest.*

*We could still give you financial help too as we shouldn't leave till November when Daddy will have done 27 years. We should know something definite by the time I write again.*

*What is your present money situation? I sent £50 to Fiona this month and I don't suppose she has spent it all so get some from there. I feel a little worried about her, Granny and she don't get on, G. criticizes her friends and their accents and makes it awkward for her to bring them home and I'm trying to persuade her to get away in the summer as much as possible but it seems a pity she can't enjoy her own home. Perhaps I'm exaggerating the situation, another good reason for coming home.*

*I've spent the past week nursing my cold which got better and then worse again but it seems to have cleared up at last and I'm now enjoying being cosseted with milk and tonics and breakfast in bed.*

*We went to spend the week end with friends<sup>321</sup> at Mohokutie which was the first garden I came to in tea and is full of memories of you all, the river you fished and fell into, the little pool where you learnt to swim, the tree you fell off, can't think how any of you survived there actually! It's a terribly hot bungalow and I gasped and croaked through the week and feeling like death and was relieved to get back into our Air Conditioned room where I have got better quite quickly.*

*My hospital chore has had to be set aside but I shall have to start again next week, my hope for Family Planning now rests with the Pill, which I shall try and get the medical department to order, operations are still rather terrifying to the coolies and however much you explain they don't understand what is being done and are liable to be psychologically disturbed, and of course there is a finality about them which can be regretted if other children die.*

*I have nearly finished Peter Mundy and am then going to write an article on Sir T. Roe and send it to History To-day, could you give me their address? Don't tell Granny or anyone as the shame of having to admit rejection after Robert's successes would be galling! I'm revelling in the Oxford History which is very impartial on the whole though it is rather amazing to read that it is a matter on which the British can congratulate themselves that by 1921 the Indian continent was beginning to stir in its sleep.*

*So many subjects for books occur to one as one reads, for instance the catastrophic Afghan war of Lord Auckland where of 16,000 people who escaped from Kabul (British) one survivor arrived a few weeks later, one could write a lovely debunking Woodham Smithish book on that and on Warren Hastings and on Napier in Sind, in fact most of them. But of course they were handed India on a plate and would have had to be high minded indeed to have pushed it aside and it is always easy to be wise after the event. It is the post Mutiny period when society petrified into the stony superiority of the Raj as revealed in E.M. Forster and as I remember it when I first came out that made the tragedy of modern India. It's a tragedy I've had almost enough of frankly, though I'll never cease to feel guilty.*

*A dull letter but you must be used to them –  
My love to everyone, and lots to you, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, June 23rd 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*I was so relieved to get your letter and hear that you got through the exam without getting nosebleeds, toothaches or a nervous breakdown, all of which I had envisaged! As you say it is really of no consequence what degree you get, a friend's brother is now doing a year of Social Administration at London after getting a 3rd at Cambridge so you could always do that. You sounded as if you were in a slight trough of depression and anti-climax, sheer tiredness I expect and I hope by now you will be feeling revived. I understand the feeling you have of not quite knowing where next, but I'm sure you are doing the wisest thing in taking a year out from life to wander and wonder, and don't worry about the money side too much, we will help you as much as we can and will pay your fare from here to Vancouver, we are now allowed to draw on our Provident Fund for passages and you can count it as a late birthday present. We can also help you get started as we have the money from the car coming in, so go ahead and make your plans. I suggest you set off in mid-August then if you spend a couple of months in Israel and a month in Calcutta I reckon you will reach us for Christmas. I haven't had much success in getting you a job here but haven't tried the University yet, the*



*trouble is there won't be an awful lot of time if you want to get a job in Canada too, because we hope you will be home again for the last month of our leave next year, and anyway whatever course you take will start in September.*

*Jack Simpson came back last Monday, and we have new terms so I suppose will hang on after all, the increase in pay won't affect us too much at the moment as so much of it goes in tax, but it will bump up our provident fund quite a bit. It'll mean we can send a bit more home too and save us tearing out our hair in handfuls quite so often. When you have seen how much if anything you get from your grant let us know because it's now a subject we can discuss without anguish!*

*Seem to be having an unusually dull time here and do little but read and write, I have got onto a thing called the National Library where I may be able to borrow books for my Moghuls, I'm half way through my article on Sir T. Roe and finding I know far too much and could really write a book on him and pruning is a problem. It would be fun to trace his journeys and do a sort of "In the Steps of Sir Thomas" but alas impracticable.*

*On Saturday we broke out and went to Sonari to see "Psycho" as did the entire Nazira district so it wasn't what you could call a change. It was a frightfully hot evening and the film made me sweat even more if possible, silly but very frightening with everything happening on wild nights with ghostly music, madmen, rivers of blood (not in technicolour I'm thankful to say) and generally Hitchcocky. We sat about a bit afterwards drinking warm whisky and wondering what amusement we could possibly be getting out of it and didn't get to bed till 2 a.m. finally so that yesterday we felt tired as well as hot. I am really loathing the climate this year, can't make out why as it doesn't bother me too much usually but I wake up every morning with an awful sinking feeling at the thought of the endless hot hours ahead. The only time I forget it is when I'm working but that wears me out too. It's probably because I have time to think about it which I didn't when the girls were here. Let me know how Fiona is, everyone tells me Anne is looking very well but nobody mentions F...*

*Lunch time again, oh to be eating it on the front lawn, am terribly homesick. My love to everyone and don't do too strenuous a job if you have to do one at all. I'm so glad the ordeals over (or nearly) but I suppose leaving Oxford is a sad moment. Much love – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, July 11th 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*I can't remember whether I've heard from you this week but it doesn't matter, don't bother to write until your viva is over (except for my birthday!) as you must be sick and tired of trying to express yourself on paper. I have very little to write of except that I'm feeling much better, physically and mentally, got so depressed with the heat and feeling ill and not having anything to take my mind off it but am right back to normal now. Am particularly happy to-day having heard from Anne yesterday of Fiona's marvellous prize – was so excited I couldn't sleep in fact and had to take a pill. Daddy is thrilled too, tell her, I'll write to her to-morrow, just can't wait to get her pictures so make her wrap them up and send them, they could come with the papers perhaps unless they're oils.*

*Anne sounds very happy which is also a comfort, it just remains for you to get this last beastly bit of the exam over, how important is the viva anyway? I expect your plans are all in a state of indecision still but don't worry, it's much better to be elastic and grab at "handles of chance" as they come along. I am writing to-day to the Principal of Tura College in the Garo Hills<sup>322</sup> as I see he is advertising for a teacher of English, he wants one straight away so it wouldn't do for you but he might have some other ideas. The Garos are the people Dr Verrier Elwin mentioned in his letter, wonderful fishing rivers there, we could visit it even if*

*there isn't a job available. I see Oxfam are starting a project in Naini Tal so it might be worthwhile enquiring about that.*

*The enclosed is an answer to the nasty sneering article Granpa cut out and sent from the Telegraph – I don't suppose the paper will print it, but it might convince Granpa. I doubt it though, he is fixed in the feelings of the Victorian era when he was brought up and can't blame him really. It got it off my chest though, it makes me boil to read all the supercilious nonsense from people who presume themselves experts.*

*I have started on my old round of family planning but am not having a great deal of success, only two more women this month. The hospital is a depressing place at the moment as there is dysentery and measles and six children died last week-end, the Dr Babu is a great fat Bengali who doesn't care if the whole labour force dies and we're trying to get him shifted but it's very complicated as Tom Poole supports him and complaints made against Tom are just what Jack Simpson is waiting for as they fight all the time. As usual there is the conflict between public conscience and private loyalties which seems to dog one here. Both Tom and Jack are going on leave next week so we might be able to rustle up something in their absence but I doubt it.*

*Am stuck with the Moghuls too as I can't get any more books, have written to various places in Calcutta but as they either don't bother to answer or just write and say they haven't got them without telling me where I might be successful. Maddening country.*

*Could you give me the address of the Hakluyt Society and I think I will join. Meanwhile I'll brush up my Assamese history which I've largely forgotten. If I don't get the address of History To-day I'll send my article on Roe to you and you can see if you think it's interesting enough to pass on to them. When you are involved in a subject whose every aspect intrigues you it's difficult to judge what the reaction of people who know and care nothing about it will be.*

*No news at all, I made my first outing to the club on Monday when the whole place was a seething mass of people from Jorhat, Sonari and Moran and the film didn't arrive so we all stood about gasping and ate watered down Irish stew. We've had inches of rain every night so there are bound to be floods again poor wretches, and I mightn't be able to get through to Shillong.*

*Don't forget to let me know if you find your birth certificate. One of the things I'm looking forward to is taking my tape up to listen to, I haven't managed to hear it once here, hardly anybody has a tape recorder and the few there are are the wrong kind.*

*I will ask Terry Luscombe if I can buy his guitar off him when he goes, you can't lug yours round on your back but it would be a wonderful ice-breaker here, apart from picking up catchy tunes and learning them. Keep your tour elastic, if you are enjoying Israel you might want to stay much longer, or vice versa might not want to stay at all, the great point of travelling is to do it at one's own pace and with as little planning as possible.*

*Did John Lampett send "The Rings"? If not write & ask him for them, he's been terribly casual and we're very cross with him.*

*Much love to you all & a big kiss for my clever daughter.*

*Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, July 20th 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your very nice birthday letter which as you see arrived in good time, I wish you hadn't sent me a book, I counted your last books as my present. I think it will be a happy year for me, like you I can't often be really happy because I'm always thinking of the millions*

*of miserable, but I do get an enormous pleasure out of you all and sights and words and music. And history and animals and painting.*

*I don't see any reason why you should become humourless or bigoted, one is much more inclined that way when one is young and sure one knows the difference between right and wrong, the older one gets the less dogmatic usually, though of course it's easy to confuse tolerance with laziness. I'm sure you'll find a job where you can use all your talents and enthusiasm if you don't rush things and don't expect your life's work to be anything but confusion, frustration and just occasional gleams of pure happiness and fulfilment. I don't think that's a cynical attitude, so much of our trouble is expecting happiness as a right, those who don't expect it are patently the happiest people.*

*I haven't quite got the idea of the fisheries, are you planning to learn about increasing fish production so that you can go to some part of the world where people are hungry? I think it's a jolly good idea and I'm sure Freedom from Hunger or one of those things could advise you. I feel so guilty that I didn't get a letter off to you to cheer you on your way to your viva, I lose all sense of time here but nevertheless it was most remiss. Anyway it'll all be over now for better or worse, I hope the warden thing comes off, it should be amusing, no word about your passport so I presume you have found it.*

*Here the hot days unroll one after the other with little to distinguish them, I'm feeling better so am able to work at my Assamese and history with interest again, thank you for the address, will get Sir T Roe off but with little hope of him seeing the light of day. Never mind, I've loved doing him and feel I know him frightfully well.*

*I'm off to Shillong next Friday<sup>323</sup> and will see what the library there has to offer, they might let me borrow books. Jack Simpson is letting me take his Plymouth plus driver so I shall be able to roll round in enormous style. J.S. left to-day, huge sighs of relief are echoing round Nazira P.O. though it's going to mean rather a lot of extra work for Daddy*

*Assam is in its chronic state of flood and chaos, half the villages round here seem to be under water and the people are all huddling in make-shift shelters on the roads, as we get about two inches of rain every night I can't bear to think how miserable they must be. They seem to be utterly resigned though, and I must say are a bit unenterprising in not building their houses on stilts as this happens every year.*

*We tried to get up to Moran club on Sat. for a farewell do but were met with a river roaring over the road, shades of Ambleside in mid-summer, we drove through it for a bit but lost heart when it got deeper and seemed to stretch into the dim distance like an inland sea so turned back, not too regretfully as we hadn't wanted to go to the party much anyway. I wonder when they will try and tackle the flood problem they spend crores of rupees in relief every year.*

*Ting is lying flat out on his stomach on the verandah, with his head pillowed on his arms, looking longingly at Tessa's tail which is a couple of feet away and he is trying to pull. He tried it yesterday and she turned on him with a roar that sent him squeaking up the nearest tree. He has just found a tin of old tennis balls & been flinging them all about at once like an amateur juggler, do wish I had a cine.*

*With much love, have a good rest (mental)*

*Mummy*

The next letter from my mother was from Shillong. It was not dated but written four days after she arrived so 30th July. It was postmarked at Ambleside August 6th,

*My dear Alan,*

*Perched on the side of my hillside in Shillong I'm thinking of you perched on the top of Ullswater with all your cares and exams temporarily behind you – you have the edge on me*

*as far as climate and scenery go but these hills remind me very much of the Lake District when the shadows are dappling them and the far range is as blue as the sea.*

*I am looking forward to getting a letter when I get home telling of your interview, I don't suppose it was very soul shaking, I wonder if they give you a hint on these occasions as to how you have done?*

*Thank you for sending me the addresses and names and for your nice birthday letter which I can't remember if I have answered but was much appreciated, everyone remembered except the chambermaid who will probably come to with a scream of horror one of these days!*

*I will definitely join the Hakluyt Society as it seems to be the only way of getting books, I'm getting so interested in the early travellers I'm wondering if I shall ever get round to the Moghuls except as incidentals, it would be great fun to do a trip round the Malabar and Coromandel Coast visiting all the old factory sites and reconstructing their journeys and experiences, a sort of Historologue, history with travel thrown in instead of the other way round. However unless somebody cares to finance the venture I don't see it as a very likely one.*

*I have bought Peter Mundy up with me and am working up an article on him which I shall try out on the Sunday Statesman, whether these efforts get published or not it helps me to get the facts clear in my head.*

*I came up last Friday through the awful floods that have Assam in their grip, how anyone survives them I don't know but year after year they do, for miles on end all you can see is the tops of houses and all the wretched cattle are drifting along the roads looking for food. When one thinks of all that could be done with the power behind these rivers, all the factories it could run and the three crops of rice that could be grown a year if it was stored away against the dry season, it makes one mad that all that happens is devastation. I must admit it is quite a problem with a river like the Brahmaputra flowing through a shut in valley like this, but it could be solved I'm sure.*

*Now we have the Chinese making warlike noises again, poor poor Assam, theres no end to it, lucky the people are so passively resigned to their hopeless existence. I have been here for four days now and though I'm enjoying the peace and coolness I'm finding myself very homesick and counting the days till I can go back, in fact would go now but Daddy would be so disappointed because he has been planning this for weeks as my big treat. I shall have to go back and tell him how I had the time of my life, I'm sitting out in the sun every time it comes out so that at least I shall look well. I go into Shillong every other day, its eleven miles up hill all the way and considerably cooler than here, I took a picnic in last time and ate it with my back against a pine tree with a whipping wind whirling huge black clouds across the sky, very English.*

*I had hoped to go and see Dr Verrier Elwin but when I rang up yesterday I was told that he was not well enough to have visitors so I don't know if he has had a relapse, he had a stroke some time ago. Rather disappointing but it can't be helped.*

*I've been going round looking up Fiona's friends and doing a bit of shopping but there isn't really much to buy, the whole place shabby and seedy and very much dirtier than when the old Raj was in charge. Fascinating nevertheless, I could stand for hours and hours just watching the faces that pass, mostly hill types, solid and gay and slant eyes, the children absolutely gorgeous. I wanted to get some paints but alas don't seem to sell such things any more here.*

*When I don't go into Shillong I spend the day reading and writing and snoozing and going for little walks, have just finished "Advise and Consent"<sup>324</sup> which is terrific, though I find his style a little irritating sometimes, repetitive rather and smug a bit. This is my day for Shillong and I'm going beyond it to a village where an Englishman has set up a distillery and canning factory and shall get Daddy some rum and also find some orchids maybe. I still have the*

*museum and library to visit, have no watch and live a vague timeless existence, I'm sure I must be in bed by seven p.m.*

*Have a lot of time to think but can't seem to get much beyond thinking how lucky I am and how miserable most of the rest of the world is which is not very constructive. I can't accept any of the religious excuses for the world's unhappiness – i.e. it is man's wilful turning away from god that brings about his destruction, or his payment for the sins of a past life, this might apply to grown men but don't tell me little twisted starving children are responsible for their lot. If there is a loving god in charge of this mess it is so impossible to understand his motives that it is profitless to think about them. We shall know eventually, meanwhile there is this unfair, unjust, unhappy world into which millions more children are being born daily to become twisted and starve.*

*Sitting on top of a beautiful part of it like Ullswater it is easy to find it good, I sometimes feel it would be better if you could stay there and not come to a place like India, sensitive and with ideals it will really break your heart. Or will it, people like the Catholics who see most of the horrors seem to be able to keep their serene faith undimmed, goodness knows how, I've often asked them and they just say we cannot read god's mind but we must trust that it is working for the best etc*

*Anyway enough of this, the trouble is there are very few people I can let off steam to out here, everyone thinks I'm mad for even thinking about such things, except Daddy who agrees with me but is so burdened with practical problems that he doesn't have much time or energy for metaphysical speculation (if you could call my fuzzy thoughts that). I hope this Chinese thing won't flare up properly and prevent you coming here, personally I think they will only do what they did last time, and it will take an awful lot to get me to move.*

*I will send £20 this month and £30 next as I said, I would like you to have £40 in travellers cheques before you leave so let us know at the beginning or anyway middle of September how things stand. You will need some clothes don't forget.*

*Much love, enjoy yourself, Mummy*

Notebook: July 30th (1963)

I am back in my little hut, this time sitting on a cushion on the lawn with grass scratching the backs of my knees. Clouds are beginning to froth over the tops of the hills & pour down the sides like soapsuds & a nippy little wind is rustling the marigolds & clattering the canna leaves.

I have been sun-bathing all afternoon & feel weak as a result but pleasantly so, soothed by the sound of the mali clipping away at the grass with his blunt scissors and the clatter of the stone-grinding machines.

It is peaceful but now there is the nagging thought of the Chinese to add a poignancy to every symbol of security & happiness. Perhaps it is salutary to have this 6 monthly threat, to make us appreciate once more the blessings that are threatened, we are so easily tempted to underestimate them & forget. For myself though I would rather have some other reminder, there is so much to sadden & sicken one in this flood-ridden, destitute, hopeless country.

My drive up was spent staring out at miles of water, beautiful beyond belief when it reflected the blue hills & the clouds, but ugly and terrifying in its implications. The cows pattered along the roads driven by gaunt men (that helpless patter of animals' feet, driven along to fates they don't deserve, to pastureless fields, to slaughter houses, it is one of the saddest, gentlest sounds I know, like the rattle of dead leaves along dry roads).

At Nowgong starving dogs with sores looked at me out of triangular eyes full of longing & desperation. I fed them biscuits & they licked up every crumb and stared at me until I had to look away; that is India – looking away, trying not to see, not to care, not to let

the rage & anguish & anger rise up & choke you. And now the Chinese, could a loving God contrive more?

I can no longer accept the idea that there is a kind mind in charge of this mess, or rather, like Buddha, I am not prepared to disentangle his motives if God does exist. We shall see. For the moment speculation is profitless and I don't intend to waste any more time on it.

Solemn thoughts for a cloudy evening. I have done a lot of thinking since I've been here, mostly of a meandering & fuzzy kind, but some more purposeful. Out of it all has emerged a profound thankfulness for my miraculous marriage & a sort of re-dedication to it. I've also been stepping back in to that afternoon in New Milton [1935 - summer] & finding in that awful racking sense of loss & desertion the answer to most of my present uncertainties. Not fanciful really, a bit Freudian but true. Everybody has their awful afternoons I suppose. I am in too dissecting a mood to write this – also influenced by "Advise & Consent" which I have just finished.

August 1st (1963)

Now I'm sitting drinking hot rum & lime, a cold making my head heavy & thumpy. I'm so cross about this, can't think why I always have to get colds these days. I had lunch on the golf course, a more successful picnic than last time, among some pine trees with cloud & sun racing across the slopes. There was a warm wind that made the trees sigh like the sea – if I shield my eyes I could imagine myself near the Tarns on an April day with a west wind blowing, except for the yodelling of Khasis and the cawing of crows and the nipping of ants.

The road slithered like a snake over the green mound & out of sight & cows cropped and glided like tin animals pulled across a baize topped table. I ate biscuits & watched the vast labours of ants removing the crumbs and read D.H. Lawrence and watched the pure trees etched against the changing sky.

I somehow felt this was a moment of peace & serenity I wanted to hold onto; the dark blue hills, the gold patches of mustard, the red rooves, the laughing Khasis bent double under their loads of grass, their study legs moving in brown harmony: the little boy watching black goats & collecting sticks: and over it all the racing sky sending down warmth & wind by turns. Finally I saw the clouds coming up solid and menacing and decided I must go home.

The rum is making me feel hot and even headier but perhaps that's good. Yesterday Mrs Merchant & I went to Mufling, a lovely drive but when we got there it was lost in a drizzly cloud so we bought our stuff & came home. I would like to have gone by myself on a nice day, it was cold & remote & delicious, I think I could live out there – or could I? If I had animals & books & a garden perhaps – & Mac. But perhaps he would be bored, me too probably.

The Phukans came to see me last night, both very young & shy, she prettier than I thought in a gold and green sari, oiled & scented & glittering with bracelets – & me in my Terylene skirt sniffing! Oh bother my cold, I must have my omelette & go to bed.

The next, undated, letter from my mother was written in early August 1963, after she returned to Cherideo.

*My dear Alan,*

*I thought you would like to have this<sup>325</sup> which was waiting for me on my return, and gave me a great thrill as you can imagine. My first rather unworthy thought was "Snooks to Robert", I thought it was a very nice letter though and sent almost by return of post – don't lose it, it might be the Breakthrough. I owe a lot to you for your interest and encouragement, it is very easy to get discouraged when one is thudding away on a typewriter on boiling hot*

*days in this remote corner of the world, but I now shall take up my work with fresh enthusiasm.*

*By now you will have heard your results and will either be sunk in gloom or whooping it up, I suppose the long viva meant that you were a border line case, but that doesn't help because one doesn't know which border! It doesn't matter to us in the slightest, or to you really except your pride as you don't intend to get a "good" job in the sense of one bringing in large sums of money where the snob value of a first might matter. You don't need to have your injections till ten days before you leave so needn't worry about that for the present, the situation here is a bit depressing again, many people think this is just a political move on the part of the Chinese, a sort of war of nerves, let's hope they're right. We are to be flown out at the first sign of any real trouble, what's the betting I shall be arriving just as you leave. It adds a sort of greyness to everything, this feeling one might have to leave it again, sad but I'm afraid this situation is going to go on recurring for years and ones just got to learn to live with it.*

*I came down from Shillong yesterday and it was lovely to be back, one of the main bridges has fallen down and I was wondering if I'd get through but there was a most efficient little ferry working and we chugged across it in no time. Still it took me twelve hours with a couple of breaks, and I was very hot and worn out when I arrived, found Daddy sporting in the swimming pool in Nazira but pulled him out and made him take me home where I found a lovely pile of letters waiting for me, a big welcome from the dogs and Ting and a heavenly Dunlopillo mattress to sink into, the bed in Shillong was like marble. The change has done me good, chiefly in making me appreciate what I have here, the garden is looking lovely and the bungalow and the hot weather doesn't seem to stretch too far ahead and I'm full of ideas for more articles to batter the press with. Meanwhile I must get this off as I haven't unpacked properly and have lots of odd jobs to finish – but wanted to send it straight to you. Mind you send me a copy of the paper when it comes out.*

*With much love from us both – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, August 9th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*We saw the results of your exam in the paper yesterday and were thrilled – of course we knew you would do it but it is wonderful nevertheless. You deserved it after all that hard work, and I hope now you are having a blissful rest with all the tension eased out of your system. We just can't get over our good fortune in having such gifted children, really it is little short of miraculous – anyway thank you for all your work and for making the very small sacrifices we have had to make more than worthwhile. I only wish you hadn't had to scrape so much at Oxford, but I suppose a lot of others do too, it's just one of those things. How I wish I could be there to see you get your degree, Daddy is talking wildly of flying me home but I'm afraid it's out of the question really, let us know when it's to be so that we can visualise it anyway.*

*I shall always remember getting the news, I was watching the efforts of a python in the chicken run to climb out, he had been caught in the tea and was about to be hacked to death when Daddy rescued him and we let him cool off a bit before escaping. He had just reared his eight-foot length and got his head over the edge of the wire netting when Daddy appeared on the back verandah with the paper, I was so glad he read the lists first, I should have been in such a panic I would have missed your name altogether. We celebrated with some cherry brandy and I felt wonderfully relaxed and fulfilled, all the things we had planned for years coming true although there was a sort of sadness too that our "little boy" was finally grown*



*up and on his own! Now you will be able to concentrate on your tour with an easy mind and I hope the Israel thing will work out.*

*Your birthday present arrived yesterday and looks fascinating, I have glanced through it but not started to read it yet but it just what I revel in as you know. Thank you very much. Assam is one of the strongholds of the "White Goddess",<sup>326</sup> the primitive tribes who first flowed in were all matriarchal, and even when they became Hinduised it was a special form of Hinduism with the worship of the "sakti" or female principal as its main form. One of the things I've often wanted to study but never got round to (chiefly language difficulty) was the strange blending of myth and religion that produced the Tantric cult which was special to Assam until Sankara Deva arrived, and still has many adherents I think.*

*No more news of the Chinese, I don't think they will come at the moment anyway with all the rivers in spate and half the country under water. Not much news since my letter a day or two ago, I am slipping happily back into my old routine, am now writing an article on Peter Mundy which I will send to the Statesman, they only print about 3,000 words so the problem is to clip it down to that limit. I shall merely feel superior if they refuse it! Daddy has sent for a very expensive book on the Moghuls from Probsthain the Oriental Booksellers so with 2 vols of that and the ones you have sent I should be kept busy for a while.*

*I'm delighted at the thought of getting Robinson by the way, it is the one account of Assam I've never read and seems unprocurable here. I read a D.H. Lawrence in Shillong, three short stories which I'm afraid I found mildly irritating though wonderfully written of course, he carries on all right until his obsession with the relationship between men and women seems to divert him and he goes drivelling on and on about that and loses all sense of direction.*

*No news of Jack Simpson but the shares are soaring and it looks as if someone is trying to buy out the company – happy thought! Daddy is having a worrying time with food supplies short on top of the usual worries. Really we ought to be given danger money for living here. He joins me in love and congratulations, or even might write with luck. Have a good rest & don't worry about anything for a bit – how did your friends do?*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, August 22nd 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter and the enclosed, how sad you were just pipped at the post for a first, but a comfort to you to know how close you got and as you say may do the trick as far as a scholarship goes. I couldn't quite understand your tutor's remarks, which paper was it you didn't do so well on? If you get a scholarship will you give up your tour for the time being and carry straight on? I hope Robert was duly impressed, I don't know why we have such shabby thoughts about him as he has never been cocky or unpleasant about his successes!*

*I got a letter from the principal of Mayo College in Ajmer<sup>327</sup> saying he didn't know if he could give you a job, he wouldn't know till you could give him more accurate dates etc. but as your plans will be fluid all along the line I think it would be better to leave job hunting till nearer the time. In a way I would like you to go straight on with your diploma but don't want to influence you. Sorry to hear about the nose bleeds, it's funny how they always come on at this time of year, you might think about having your nose cauterised if you can ever get to see Mylchrest,<sup>328</sup> your mountain fastness certainly has disadvantages without transport.*

*The only name I recognised from the list was Monks who was that nice boy you went to Borstal camp with I think, was he disappointed to get a 3rd?.*

*Slight gloom here as Ting is ill, he has a chill on the liver I think, they are very prone to it and its difficult to know what to do. I have had him indoors for a couple of days and he's been so miserable that I've let him out this morning but he is sitting crouched miserably in a tree, not at all his usual self. Why do I always let myself in for this?*

*We've had rain and more rain, everything is awash and it's hard to imagine that in the winter the ground is cracked and dusty.*

*Haven't done much this week, we went into the club on Monday but didn't stay to the film as it was an ancient Mickey Rooney thing about the American navy, a combination I just couldn't stomach. We spent all Sunday at the pool in Nazira, we are all making good use of it while Jack Simpson is away, he comes back on September 18th so the fun is nearly over. Daddy isn't taking his double job too seriously, he has got to the stage of not caring what They think (if they ever do) although he still worries quite a bit about his tea bushes.*

*We don't know now whether we can afford to take our local leave in Naini, and may go to the Garo Hills to an inspection bungalow for ten days instead, can have a look round and see what it's like from your point of view, the Garos being one of the only two matriarchal societies left in India (I think) could well be built up into a thesis for your next project.*

*I am finding "The White Goddess" fascinating, but at least half of it is above my head, such erudition is depressing rather, but I suppose if you spend a secluded life-time of study it becomes possible. I feel I've wasted so many opportunities with all these primitive tribes working here who I could have studied but it's too late now, I've contacted someone in Lahore who will help me get books on my Moghals so will be able to carry on with yours and the help of the National Library. I agree there will not be the same interest in my article as Roberts, but if I ever finish a book it might be handy to have the contact with Quennel?*

*An admirer (of my letter to the papers!) in Calcutta has sent me a coin of Shajehan's and I am intrigued and feel the collection of coins might be fascinating, it's very heavy as it must be solid silver, the weight of a coin being the most important thing about it in those days.*

*Must go and see my poor ailing ape, hope you're feeling rested, mentally anyway, don't feel you've got to go on and on with your job – though it might be advisable to make it last till the cousins have scattered from the region of Field Head...*

*With much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, August 31st 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*No letter from you this week, maybe you are changing hostels or perhaps given up altogether, no letter from Fiona either so maybe it's the post but the paper is arriving, we get the Simpsons edition of the Telegraph which we are going to miss when they come back in a couple of week's time. I had another letter from the Principal of Mayo College whom I'd written to about a job, he seems an absent minded gent as he apologised for not answering my letter and said he probably could give you a temporary job if you would let him know when you would be coming. The term starts in January and I imagine you would stay about six months? Anyway let me as soon as you can what your plans are, I know it's awfully difficult as everything depends on something else, but once one thing clicks the whole thing will fall into place. If you could keep yourself for a couple of months in Israel we could save up enough to pay your fare on here, if you haven't abandoned the whole idea by now.*

*August drawing to a close thank goodness, the last two weeks have been depressing as I have been battling with Ting, still am and he is very poorly to-day. He gets better and then suddenly much worse, I put him on the latest sulpha drugs and he perked up a lot and then suddenly collapsed with a swollen face and I had to hurriedly stop – now the pneumonia*

*seems to be back and it's difficult to know what to do next. My fault for taking on animals in a country where there are no vets.*

*It has rained and rained without a pause for the last ten days which hasn't helped, floods everywhere and the roads worse than I've ever seen them – but I think I say that every year. Never mind its nearly over, now for the yearly escape from the Chinese! They certainly seem to be achieving their object of disrupting the country, Lord Colyton<sup>329</sup> will be delighted. I liked his remark that Goa had lived "quite sleepily" under the Portuguese since being taken over by them, he's obviously never opened a history book. Nor has the other man who said the P's had a right to it because of a treaty made with an Indian prince in 1779 – the prince in question being an impotent and feeble figurehead who was "kidnapped" first by the Mahratta's (who blinded him) and then by Wellesley – and on this treaty apparently the Hague court decided the validity of Portugal's claim. Ah well, it's not good getting het up because the Telegraph is anti-India and thats all there is to it, the Guardian has much more balanced articles.*

*I've finished the "White Goddess", slightly dazed, it was fascinating, though I thought his idea that we should go back to worshipping a lustful and bloodthirsty mother figure instead of a loving and compassionate father rather odd to say the least of it. I am re-reading the Golden Bough to compare it, Frazer also has some odd ideas, such as the dangerous and miserable state of the savage who must quickly be weaned of all his old ideas and education – which makes one wonder if he ever lived in a savage society as the first thing that strikes one is that they are happy and well adjusted. Of course he was a Victorian with all the reforming zeal and intolerance that implies.*

*There really isn't any news this week at all, I haven't been out of the compound except to go for muddy walks with the dogs, the chief talking point is the fact that somebody is trying to take over the company – we have hopes that a fat Indian in a huge Cadillac will arrive one day and give Jack Simpson the sack. It would suit us fine as we could take our pension and come home but of course some people are only half way through wouldn't be so well off.*

*No news and Daddy demanding lunch, hope I'll have a more cheerful outlook in my next!*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, September 7th 1963*

*My dear Alan*

*A letter from you at last, it seemed ages since we had heard and I was worrying that all your plans were going astray, but we're delighted to hear that you had got your State Studentship, we will leave it to you and your tutor to decide when you start. We will add £100 a year to your grant, that will bring it up to £500 a year which won't be very much but you should be able to manage and of course we shall be able to help out at odd times if you are short.*

*I agree that something practical would be best now, humanitarian work nowadays is not charity but positive instruction in how to grow two crops instead of one irrigate, drain and fertilise or breed fish – I think you would find this interesting too once you got started – couldn't you find a course that combined social economy with anthropology and then you could spend one of your long vacs out here living with the Garos who are as backward as they come –and could probably pay for your time in articles. Will you be going to Oxford or some provincial university? I agree that there won't be time to do a world tour properly, you could leave that till your course is over.*

*I only sent £20 this month so that is 60 altogether. I don't want you to start off for Europe penniless so let us know how things stand. Perhaps you could go to Sicily and get some practical experience if you can't make Israel.*

*It is very cheering to have that problem settled as it has been a cheerless week with Ting getting worse and a heat wave and no letters from anyone (except a postcard from Fiona in Cornwall which sounded slightly hair-raising "Spent the night in caravan with four college boys" "Spent the night in smugglers cave with drips (more college boys?) but don't tell Granny this her worst fears would be confirmed!)).*

*Ting is still alive but only just, I sometimes feel it would have been kinder to let him curl up and die in the wet grass as he wanted to instead of struggling to keep him going on injections and coddling, he is so weak now he can hardly hold a banana his hands tremble so, the sad thing is he has turned against me as I suppose he connects me with all his suffering, I have him out in his run in the sun in the hopes that he will get the urge to recover but I don't know if he will. A very tiny bit of the suffering that is going on everywhere but one feels it especially if one sees it in front of one's eyes.*

*Your two books, "Mughal India" and "Account of Assam" arrived a couple of days ago and I was delighted with them both, I am reading both at the same time and making notes on the Mughals – it is a very simple and clear account and exactly what I wanted. Daddy has sent for 2 vols of another book on them so I shall be set up for a long time now, I was pleased to see a letter in the paper yesterday saying all the things I say in my letters which they never publish, answering an idiotic one from a Dr Callendar, I can almost hear the scrape of angry pens in Cheltenham and Camberley as all the old Cols. get ready to defend the Raj.*

*In between my work I'm reading "Sword at Sunset"<sup>330</sup> a novel about King Arthur which I'm enjoying very much, though it's sad to see the chivalrous knight turned into an ancient Briton with his band of rough soldiers round him fighting the Saxons, which I suppose he really was. I also got Grandpas parcel of books and am about to embark on them, "Mysticism" is I'm sure an expression of what I feel, though fuzzily.*

*The temperature is hitting 92 every day and very humid, but this is probably the last burst of heat and this time next month there will be a real difference, if only the Chinese will keep away.*

*No news, apart from nursing Ting and going to the club once to see a film I haven't done a thing, we have the first gay evening of the season coming up next Sat. when the Indians are giving us a party (can't remember why) and getting in some dancing girls which might be nice – as long as we aren't expected to dance in this temperature. The club is at its lowest ebb just now, but will perhaps sink even lower when Jack Simpson arrives back in a couple of weeks' time! It doesn't matter so much in the cold weather though as there are other things to do like fishing trips and picnics.*

*Do hope the cauterisation has worked, it's very tiresome having these nose bleeds, does height affect them I wonder as you don't seem to get them in Oxford*

*Must write to Mr Gibson in Ajmer saying you won't need a job with him after all, it might have been interesting but excessively hot as Rajasthan is a simmering desert.*

*Much love & hearty congrats from us both – Mummy  
Did you ever get our wire?*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, September 13th 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter yesterday, sorry I was so moany about not hearing, it was just a bad week and I was moany about everything. I hope your present youth hostel is a little less remote, it doesn't sound it! Daddy and I might well throw in the sponge and retire to some mountain fastness, I often feel we would be happier but D. feels he must go on earning to the last moment.*

*I expect you will have come to some decision about your future by now, don't leave it too long and lose the grant. If you spent your holidays doing social work perhaps you wouldn't feel so bad about spending your time contemplating while the world suffered, but couldn't you use your grant for social science in some form, there is endless scope here for youth club and after care and so on in the cities. I seem to give you contrary advice in every letter, luckily you will probably ignore it all and make your own choice. The trouble is I'm out of touch and simply don't know what courses there are.*

*I'll see what I can do about collecting folk tales,<sup>331</sup> I mean to try and visit in the villages when it gets cooler, but I've meant to do that for so long and something always crops up. Probably the Chinese!*

*It's been an awful week, frantically hot with the Air Conditioner broken down and Ting getting daily weaker, so that between the two I've had very little sleep. But the night before last the rain came at last and it is much cooler and Ting also seems a little stronger though still not out of the wood. I'm giving him liver and vitamin injections now to try and boost him up as he has no appetite, the doctor doesn't think now that it is pneumonia and suspects T.B. which is a bit depressing but we shall have to hope for the best. When the cold weather really arrives, if he lasts, he should get his spirit back. Me too, I haven't been able to work during the heat, very feeble really, but have taken up the Moghuls again now and have just made notes on the first of them, Babur, a real charmer. I'm hoping to be able to get hold of his diary.*

*I got a letter from Julia saying Granny had thought I'd got my article accepted on the strength of Robert's name but you had quietly put her right – thank you!*

*I've had my depressing week cheered by "Sword at Sunset", a lovely book about King Arthur, you should read it, very moving and though it strips a lot of the glamour off the chivalric story and replaces it with a more likely setting, it is still inspiring. Quite a lot of Frazerish incident too, the ritual sacrifice of the king, the Sin that must be expiated etc. We have such a nice new assistant,<sup>332</sup> your age and half way through his first novel, and a fan of T.H. White. It is nice to find someone one can talk to, his two main passions are the Himalayas and falconry, I don't know if he will be able to satisfy either here and doubt if he'll stay. It's odd how much more I have in common with the young lads than my old generation, they seem so much more aware and interested, I suppose the gloss will wear off, sadly.*

*Daddy and I have given up the idea of Naini Tal for our local leave and will either go to the Garo Hills or Shillong – we are determined to go somewhere, just to get out of sight and sound of planters. The Pooles are bringing out some oil paints for me so I can find a river for Daddy to fish in we should both be contented. Just to hear the wind in the pines will be enough, and come back to a fire in the evenings.*

*No news as usual, but a less gloomy outlook,*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Are you a B.A. officially?*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, September 23rd 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*I didn't write last week, it was a bad week as Ting died on Thursday. I thought he was better but everything suddenly went wrong and he suffered very much at the end. I have been terribly bleak since, this is a bad place for trying to get over things as there is no outlet, nowhere to go to, I read and work until I'm dizzy but then there comes a time when I must stop and then regrets and memories rush in. I know it is only a minute fraction of the suffering that goes on everywhere, but one is struck afresh with the pointlessness of it, let us*

*beastly selfish grasping men suffer but why a small innocent animal who has done nobody any harm. One can go on banging one's head and asking why for ever, there seems no answer but acceptance. I don't think I got a letter from you either, by now you will probably have made up your mind about your future and I hope are happy about it.*

*You would have wonderful weather now that everyone is back at work, got a scrawl from Fiona to say they had fixed themselves up a flat but have heard nothing about Cornwall, probably just as well! There is a definite feel of the cold weather about, the days are still hot but early in the morning there is a tang and a slight mist and the pampas grass is flowering which is always an encouraging sign.*

*Jack Simpson is back from leave, not such a good omen, he arrived yesterday and we are all waiting for the broom to start sweeping furiously but most of us are not in the mood to be swept. Just at present I feel I want to leave India, now, and for ever. I can't take it anymore and the helplessness of its suffering – so we shall probably be after that warden's job in the Isle of Arran – how lovely it sounds, the cold sea air, the gulls, no more blindness, starvation and sores. But I doubt if there is really any escape and one will carry the sores and sorrows round with one forever.*

*I have just read James Baldwins "The Fire Next Time" (Terry's father has published it) it is very moving and beautifully written and makes one see more clearly exactly what it is to have a black skin. I think your generation will have a saner outlook on that, it is something ingrained in the older people, so instinctive that it probably dates way back to a primitive world, that despising of colour. Like anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism – really the more I survey the Victorian scene the more unpleasant they seem to be. And yet my grandmother who hated Catholics and despised Jews and thought Black Men were animals was in many ways a pet and spent an awful lot of time and money on charity. Ditto Granpa who is a terrible snob, it seems that people who are intolerant in general are kinder in particulars.*

*Daddy and I have made a vow that we aren't going to the club any more, at least not unless we absolutely have to, and I hope to visit the villages more and try and paint and collect folk stories. I'm beginning to get the hang of the Moghuls and their administration, and feel I know enough to write several books already but I still haven't decided how to approach the subject from a fresh angle.*

*I see the battle of the British in India is still going on in the paper, alas we've had our last Telegraph now that Jack is back, we're going to miss it, when I get the cheque for my article I think I may order it but there are so many things I want for us all, I can see myself spending the money about six times over.*

*I hope I'll be feeling more cheerful in my next letter – time is a healer & the stale flat & unprofitable feeling will pass. Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, October 3rd, 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Two letters from you last week for which I was very thankful as I was feeling pretty depressed. I am recovering now, though have terrible pangs sometimes. Still I think I am trembling on the verge of some discovery about pain and suffering, something to do with pain being at the heart of happiness (as it always is) and vice versa – I can't really explain but it has a lot to do with Evelyn Underhill<sup>333</sup> and the one-ness of experience, I haven't grasped it yet except in flashes. It's a most interesting and enlightening book, and I now want to read all the references she lists, I think I shall start with the Sufi mystics who I can get here, I can't ever see myself having the time or opportunity to meditate properly!*

*I am glad your future has resolved itself, as you say there are things in favour of both courses but now it has been decided for you you can relax and make the best of it. You don't*

*say what you are studying for what degree or doctorate. Of course I am longing to appear in my llama-chewed headgear to coo over you – we were both regretting bitterly the fact that we wouldn't be able to see you get your bona fide B.A. – but as you say you might perhaps have to take it now – I hope not though.*

*Here it is quite chilly to-day, with a wind and heavy cloud, lovely. Our party on Saturday was quite chaotic, everything possible went wrong with the food and the Lobbans got tight and wouldn't be thrown out till 3 a.m. and then we were scared stiff of letting either of them drive home but they were in the obstinate mood that one can't talk sense to. However by some miracle they made it, having first rammed the fir tree by the gate and missed the brick wall by inches. I was worn out before the party even started as I hadn't slept the previous night so spent the evening stifling yawns and wishing they would all go home. Sunday was a lost day trying to recover, and on Monday was the club so it's been an odd and wearing week really, however we are back in the old groove again at last.*

*Our new scientific officer in John's place<sup>334</sup> has arrived plus wife, they are such a nice couple, both about your age having just graduated from Reading, she is a zoologist and they are frightfully keen and fresh – let's hope the old Assam lethargy doesn't set in too quickly. He knows Elterwater well and the Britannia<sup>335</sup> and Mrs Smith and its refreshing to get away from the eternal natter about personalities and Tea. I'm afraid they won't find many people here to share their interests, the only one I can think of is the other new assistant Connell, he is a Robert Graves fan and has leant me the Claudius books so what with the Moghuls, Mysticism and that my head is fair spinning. He is writing a book himself which he is going to let me read (and type perhaps but I fear it will take too long). I am afraid it may be terrible and I shant know what to say, he is far too young to have had the necessary experience to write a novel I feel. I have finished my notes on your Moghul book and have sent off to the National Library in the hopes I'll be able to get more from them, if they can't help I will join the Hakluyt Society.*

*The Simpson were out yesterday, their eldest son has fled from his bank-clerkship and is working as a waiter in Luxembourg which he is enjoying but I don't know what the future offers. The Pooles eldest, George, only passed one "O" level to their and our disappointment as he is already 17 ½ and has no time to waste – must be something wrong with the school I feel.*

*We have put off our trip to the Garo Hills although the bungalow was booked, the road is apparently pretty dreadful and Daddy would have been worrying the whole time about it, it was over 300 miles too which wouldn't have been much fun in a jeep – if we could have got one. So we shall be going to Shillong after all, not very thrilling but the fresh air will do us both good and it is full of places of pilgrimage for us. We shall get there just in time for Daddy's birthday.*

*It was nice to get your description of Fiona's flat, she did actually send us a scrawl a few days later but told us little except that she was happy and the place seemed to be full of friends called Jim and suchlike who I think she is probably supporting – oh well, one must keep up with the times!*

*You can do what you like with the money, you will need clothes, probably a suit, and anything you have over can go to the Croft Fund. We are hoping to go to Geeya<sup>336</sup> where Daddy's uncle was a minister and find something there, we still owe you a 21st birthday present and that could perhaps be it. I believe you lent Fiona some money, as neither she nor Granny let me know how things stand it is difficult but I thought she had plenty. Do hope you are cosily dug in somewhere with your tapes and filing cabinet and don't feel "stale" – but this time you will be working along different lines presumably without an exam hanging over you?*

*With much love, Mummy*



Iris to Alan, Cherideo, October 9th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*So glad to hear you have come to roost safely in Oxford, full circle to St Margaret's Road or almost. It is lovely to think of you settling down in front of another fire with your typewriter and your tapes, you haven't said what your thesis is going to be about yet or how long it will last. We have just read Robert Graves "Goodbye to all that" and enjoyed it enormously, is he still at Oxford? I see one of his prep schools was Cophthorne about which he is gently scathing. I have finished "I Claudius" and am reading the sequel now, a little ponderous in parts and I get muddled with the relationships but am enjoying it all the same. Interesting that J. Caesar, Alexander and Akbar were all epileptic - perhaps there are more - subject for a thesis there?*

*I have started dabbling with my oils again but I find it the most soothing of occupations, knowing I am not good I have no standards to strive for whereas in my writing I'm always falling short and suffering. No that's not true really, it's the struggle for adjectives that tires me, I have now got a notebook full of adjectives which I riffle through when I'm stuck, all wrong I'm sure but in history one is constantly describing people and trying to find new words to do it with.*

*We've had a week of grey drizzly days, very English but warmer and last night a downpour that knocked hell out of my beans, not to mention a small earthquake, but to-day the sun is out and everything is glittering and stretching in the warmth. I've just been down to the hospital where there are fewer patients and less flies, sometimes it is so depressing I could scream and at others quite reasonable. My family planning is not doing very well, only a trickle, but in other gardens they are making headway and the Pill is due to arrive any moment I think which is really the only solution.*

*I've been having a sleepless spell which has made the last few days drag, but last night I had a wonderful sleep and feel so much better. We had a quiet week-end, on Monday there was a committee meeting at which the spree was decided on and me elected to do the decorating for it, both of which decisions are somewhat depressing. I hate these orgies of false merriment, so do most other people but we go on enduring them year after year out of habit, terrible waste of money too. I have no ideas for the decorations at all, have written to Fiona in the hopes that she will give birth to something.*

*There is a row brewing up over the management of the club and everyone including Daddy is threatening to resign so with any luck that might put a lid on it.*

*We hope to start our river picnics soon, the Nagas seem to be fairly quiet at the moment, we had a military brass up here on Sunday and he thought we should even be able to get permits to go to Kohima. He was supposed to have been bringing a general to see us yesterday but they never turned up, the general, a Cambridge man I'm sorry to say, was military governor of Goa after its take-over so I was hoping to have some news for Lord Colyton,<sup>337</sup> not that the silly old fossil would listen (have no idea how old he is but he gives that impression).*

*No news about my article, perhaps they have shelved it after all, do hope I get paid for it in time for Christmas!*

*Thank you for sending the money to Anne, I presume your grant has arrived and you are all right for the time being? We shall be sending money home every month, but are hoping to be able to have a little put by for our leave so that we can go to Manchester for the afternoon without breaking out in a sweat of anguish every few minutes - shall always remember that last trip we did with Felicity and David Porter and not enough money to give them a decent meal! How is David by the way? Doesn't seem much news as usual, I am on my last Moghul*

*book so I hope to hear something from the national library soon, I really should mug up the whole of Indian history to get the perspective right but keep putting it off.*

*Have a happy term (?) -*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, October 18th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter yesterday, explaining your programme - I hope the sense of purposelessness has left you and also your headaches. If there is nothing wrong with your eyes these are probably due to nervous tension and will disappear as soon as you see your way clear - you have had quite a lot to cope with this year in the way of ordeals, interviews etc. and it is quite likely that your nerves have got jangled in the process. On the other hand if you have doubts about having chosen the right course it might be that. I think your restless uncertain feeling is almost inevitable and will recur to bother you at intervals but the only thing is to plod on and wait for it to pass. One must have a sense of fate (or divine guidance perhaps) and the fact that you were offered the studentship would surely be a pointer that that is the road you are supposed to tread. I suppose it is a bit primitive to look for "signs" but I have found it a comfort.*

*I do hope you get Hill<sup>338</sup> as your supervisor, I'm afraid I've never heard of him, I think a study of education might be indeed very useful and anyway I don't think study is ever wasted, it leads you into so many unexpected byways and forms new contacts that are always enriching.*

*I will refund you the £10 that F. didn't, we would like to give you a course of driving lessons and when we come home will try and get some sort of car for you - you could take the lessons at Oxford it would be easier, if you will let us know what they cost we will make it a birthday present. Presume your grant has come?*

*The sun is out for the first time for about a week. I have enjoyed the moist grey days but the hospital is full of coughs and fevers and my plants are all looking pretty dispirited. It is wonderful not to sweat any more or dread the afternoons though I get less work done now that I type on the verandah and have the distractions of birds and butterflies. The damp has got into Daddy's shoulder and he has been having ray treatment and much rubbing and sympathy, he is better to-day.*

*We still haven't heard about our bungalow in Shillong and telegrams are beginning to fly but we are determined to go even if we have to sleep in the car, just to get away from the niggling irritations of Nazira P.O. You were born in Shillong by the way and were there again from four to five - you had your tonsils out there - don't you remember it at all?*

*I hope to do some browsing in the library there this time, I'm coming to the end of my books, I think I will send you a list of the ones I chiefly want and Blackwells might be able to get them, only I insist on paying for them.*

*We've had two late nights this week, one at the club and one when the Pooles came to dinner, both spent in discussing the latest club row - the kind of thing we want to escape from. Try as we will to keep out of things we always seem to get dragged in, chiefly because Daddy is a sort of father confessor for everyone.*

*The film on Monday was amusing "Yes my darling daughter" - by the way "To Kill a Mockingbird" is a lovely book, one of the few novels I can really recommend, it is bound to be in Penguins by now. Richard sent me a parcel of books for my birthday, at the moment I'm reading "Orlando" by Virginia Woolf which is very odd - the hero goes to sleep and wakes up as a woman - I'm sure it is terribly significant but what of eludes me. Very well written of*

*course. Have just finished the "Claudius" books and liked them though I thought they were too long and detailed, it had a soporific effect in the end.*

*Mysticism is still claiming some of my attention too, I could never be a real mystic because to deny the senses would be to lose the best and most beautiful of life experiences - but I envy them their ability to break through to the reality that is just out of reach. What they chiefly lack is a sense of humour it seems, they take themselves so seriously, one of them even rejoices when her husband and children die because they are distracting her!*

*We are going to a "wine and cheese" party at the Rosses this evening and staying the night and there is a church service in the morning so our week-end is rather organised which is a pity. Next week is Durga Puja the big Hindu festival of the year but nowadays all they want to do is look at films, three every night, no dancing or drumming.*

*Miranda has spent the last week jumping out of her cage and wandering about the jungle, returning at intervals to be fed, I would like her to go on like that but alas she wouldn't last long with the military pooping off at everything they see so we have put more wire up and she is caged again – but we hope there might be a happy event in six months' time.*

*Your descriptions of autumn in Oxford reminds us of that last day we spent trailing our feet through the leaves in Worcester Coll. gardens - autumn is always the time of having to go away and leave you all and the trees opposite the flat we left Anne and Felicity in and the wet roads on the way back from Manchester and the smell of fires, all so sad, so sad. Next autumn will be the last leave taking though.*

*Much love - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan. A cottage, Shillong, 31st October 1963*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid I didn't write last week. I suddenly found the post office shut for days & days & on the Monday we left to come up here. Your letters will all be piling up too - I hope.*

*We wondered whether we were doing a dotty thing in setting off on leave with no accommodation booked – and so much to arrange in the way of pruning programmes, dogs, digs & packing away of books & linen to stop the rats eating them – but have found ourselves in the most delicious little log cabin among pine woods with Khasis yodelling all round us and the golf course only 10 minutes away. It belongs to an ex-planter friend and is idyllic – no lights, water or sanitation, but a little spring at the bottom of the hill where all the women wash their clothes and when we are sitting by lamplight in front of our stove in the evening all we want is a tape-recorder & some music. An old man brings us milk and an equally ancient lady eggs & firewood & 2 minute Nepalese boys carry water & do odd jobs – the only thing that hasn't been perfect so far is the weather, it deluged yesterday & we had to have a typical English picnic with the windows of the car tightly closed, but later the sun came out & we went for a walk on the golf course where the evening sun slanting through the pines & the blue wood smoke & a chestnut tree all golden made it exactly like home.*

*To-day is Daddy's birthday & I have sent him off to play golf this morning as I think he will get liverish – I have washed my hair & some clothes & am sitting in the sun watching the clouds dapple the hills & taking deep deep breaths of cool pine scented air. We're told we can see the whole range of the Himalayas on clear mornings but so far haven't been lucky.*

*I shall come here to write my book when I eventually finish my notes on it. My only regret is I haven't got the dogs who would have adored it, but by the time we had piled bedding, stoves etc. in the car there was very little room left.*

*We spent a night in the rest house at Gauhati & were chewed alive by mosquitos which bored through the sheets like little drills – none here, but the nights are icy, four blankets & all the windows closed & I still wake up at 5 a.m. frozen but Daddy is ready to get up & brew*

*up tea. Everything tastes & feels so good & all the little worries & frustrations of Nazira P.O. have been forgotten.*

*I've joined the library & am reading a book on Warren Hastings but rather spasmodically. Hope you're settled into your routine. Will write again - at length.*

*Much love, Mummy*

In the Autumn of 1963 the tensions between some of the Managers and the General Manager, J.J.E. Simpson, erupted into a full-blown battle. The dispute over the Nazira Club reveals the tensions which were part of a wider set of events as the Assam Tea Company moved rapidly towards its final years and dismemberment.

Letter from Simpson to The Secretary, The Assam Co, Ltd, London 4 Nov. 1963

Dear Sir,

It is with great regret that I feel myself bound to bring to the attention of the Board, the continued and flagrant disregard of authority by certain members of the Company.

A copy of a Nazira Club Committee notice calling a meeting is enclosed for the Board's perusal. This I received on Saturday evening, the 2nd November. All members of the Company have received this notice, as also all members of Behubor T.E. It is quite obvious that the issue of this Notice in itself will have caused considerable damage to my prestige and to permit the meeting, as suggested, to take place would further undermine my authority, particularly in the eyes of the younger generation. Such a resolution if permitted could only result in a free for all debate on the merits or demerits of myself as General Manager of the Company, a position which I refuse to tolerate. Furthermore, the discussion would of necessity be joined by Club members not employed by this Coy.

My immediate reaction was to dismiss both Dr. Poole and Mr. Macfarlane forthwith but instead I have decided to give them yet another opportunity of changing their ideas. Additional enclosed letter copies are those I have given to Dr. Poole and Mr. Macfarlane.

The Board will no doubt appreciate that the continued and utterly flagrant disregard of authority by certain members must cease. I am therefore taking appropriate action as follows. Should my letter to both the Secretary and the President be ignored, as I anticipate, these gentlemen will both receive letters dismissing them from the Company, and giving them 72 hours in which to remove their persons.

Whether my orders are obeyed or disobeyed action is called for against these two men. It is interesting to note that one of the Committee (Boswell, Manager of Behubor T.E.) is an outsider who has been permitted the facilities of the Club, as is given to any Company employee. This same facility is also extended to all his Assistants.

I would like to draw to the Board's attention certain facts which they may or may not be aware of, i.e. the majority of the Company employees are only too pleased to remain as they are and always have been with the Company paying all expenses, and I have already mentioned to the Board that all this upheaval is caused by the few, who refuse orders, and who wish to dictate. The fact does remain at the moment that although I have received this Notice (enclosed) signed by Poole and Macfarlane that, at the moment, Mr. Macfarlane is on local leave. It could be that he is unaware of this meeting notice, and that the decision has been made in his absence by Poole and Dowsing<sup>39</sup> (as Vice President). Although this may sound improbable, I can assure the Board it is not at all impossible. Mr. Dowsing who happens to be on the Committee and is also Vice President is a Junior Manager who has repeatedly given considerable trouble and causes a lot of extra work. I had occasion a few days ago to give him a warning in writing (a copy of which is enclosed for the Board's perusal). Mr. Dowsing is a man who is not only extremely rude to me but to my wife, and as

an example, he is the one who refuses to attend my Tennis Parties, as he considers my invitation to be an order (a copy of my standing invitation is enclosed).

The existing Committee members, i.e. Poole, Dowsing and Boswell, in particular, are very great friends; with them, but not on the Committee is Woollett<sup>340</sup>, who has officially not entered into this affair. Macfarlane is friendly with Poole and is the scapegoat; he is very easily led. Another member is Leetham who is younger and enjoys being bolshi with the others backing him up

I have given the Board all this information because what is happening now was to me a foregone conclusion. Last year whilst I was President, Poole and Woollett, who were both members, were clamouring for the removal of the Assam Company from Club affairs. They demanded that the Assam Company had nothing to do with the Club. As President, I told them that without the Assam Company they would indeed be in a fix, and that their demands were quite ridiculous. Nevertheless, Poole in particular, was adamant and succeeded in ousting me as President. This I conveyed to the Chairman last year, and the beginning of this year. He advised me to let them carry on. the result is as we now have it. I would like to make it quite clear that being removed as President did not in any way worry me; on the contrary, I was very pleased, but as I still remain General Manager and as the whole Club, the fittings, and the whole area is Company property, it is my responsibility to control expenses, and demand that nothing is done without my permission, particularly where company funds are involved.

There is no reason at all why this set up should not have carried on, but with the Committee as they are, and determined to undermine authority as and when they can, and still persisting, there is I fear only one way of stopping it, and that is to remove the trouble makers. If I can have the backing of the Board I will stop all this nonsense in five minutes. There would be no loss involved, replacements would be simple.

The Board may wonder to what extent the Nazira Administration, i.e. item 3 on the Agenda, has increased their charges. This item amounts to about Rs. 300/- more than the previous year and bears no relation whatsoever to a suggested increase in Club subs.

As various Committee members have been away on leave, and the president (Macfarlane) still is, the contents of the letter sent to me by the Chairman has not been conveyed to all members of the Committee but it was conveyed to Macfarlane as President. As his reply was most unsatisfactory, I was giving him yet another opportunity. This I conveyed to the Chairman in a personal letter last week, and I have since written Macfarlane asking him to see me on his return from leave. Meantime, the Meeting Notice referred to above has been received.

I trust that this unfortunately long letter will place the Board in the picture and when I hope that, as well as writing me, they will cable their complete concurrence of the actions taken.

I am, Dear Sir,  
Yours faithfully etc.

November 5th 1963, Nazira Club  
To General Manager

Dear Sir,

Reference your private and confidential letter dated 5th November, I have issued instructions to the Hon. Secretary, Dr. Poole, to cancel the Extraordinary General Meeting which was to be held on the 13th November. Signed D.K. Macfarlane, President (Assam Co.) Club

6th November, 1963

General Manager to Dr. T.W.Poole, Hon. Secretary Nazira (Assam Company) Club

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter of to-day's date advising that the Extraordinary General Meeting scheduled for the 13th instant will be cancelled, for which I thank.

I trust that the Notice of cancellation will be circulated to members to-day.

Same date, General Manager to D.K.Macfarlane, President, Nazira (Assam Company) Club

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your letter dated November 5th indicating that you have issued instructions to the Club Honorary Secretary, Dr. T.W. Poole, to cancel the proposed extraordinary meeting scheduled for the 13th November, for which I thank you.

6th November, 1963 - To London.

Further to my letter No P. 63.33 I now enclose the copy of a letter from Mr. D.K. Macfarlane dated 5th November, 1963 and from Dr. T.W. Poole dated 6th November, 1963, together with a copy of my reply to each of the gentlemen concerned, both of to-day's date.

I now feel I should leave sit entirely to the Board whether they advise action should be taken of any kind against any or all of the individuals concerned.

Signed General Manager

Iris to Alan, Shillong, Nov 6th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*No letters have reached us here yet, so I feel very cut off but I expect there's been the usual hitch somewhere. Such a beautiful day, I'm sitting outside the golf-club looking over the wooded hills & watching hooded Khasi women carry bundles of wood up the green snake of a road that slides from here down into a valley & then up again to our little hut.*

*It could be perfect - it was until we found the General Manager's car waiting outside the club yesterday. I told you of the row between him & the club committee who had decided to call an extraordinary general meeting to thrash things out - well Jack Simpson sent a letter yesterday to say that unless Daddy cancelled the meeting he would be sacked & given "72 hours to remove his person"! We would like to have called his bluff but felt as other people were involved we would have to give in this time but it is obviously war and we shall probably be living off your grant soon! We really think J.S. is going round the bend, he has enraged everyone in Assam, police, civil authorities, labour, staff & still goes storming on - but I think the Board must catch on soon - but don't know if we shall survive to celebrate the day! I hate feeling so furious & vindictive it makes me physically sick sometimes, but when I think of all Daddy has done out here to see him treated like a delinquent schoolboy is really too much. We're going back a day early to talk things over & see what the next move should be. I personally think we should carry on as if nothing had happened & let him enjoy his hollow little victory if he can.*

*This is the next day & we are having a lunch picnic beside an emerald green river with pine trees coming down to white sandbanks and water frothing over elephant grey boulders exactly like the Duddon but bigger - a cloudless day although we are nearly at Cherrapunji, the wettest place in the world (?). We're both burnt to cinders from golf & it is all quite perfect & J.S. seems a million miles away & quite unimportant.*

*I've read & made notes on "Warren Hastings" since I've been here to feel it hasn't been frittered time completely – Daddy has been a bit on edge but feeling happier that things have come to a head, one of our ex-planters & a great friend of his has been around to talk to, he has a Khasi wife & has retired up here – seems to be happy but I wonder if one can ever really settle in a foreign country. I don't think I could. Daddy wants to move on so must leave this blissful place – will post this in Shillong.*

*Don't worry about us, we might all be together for Christmas - sometimes I feel it would be the best thing for us all. No letters have come to us here so hope all is well with you.  
Much love, Mummy*

R.G.G. Higham, The Manager, Suntok T.E. 13th November 1963  
to the General Manager

Dear Sir,

With reference to your special circular of the 12th Nov 1963, I wish to point out that the name of our club is "Nazira Club", NOT "Nazira (Assam Co. Ltd.) Club". It is a private club and its Rules and its name, can only be changed by a majority vote at a General Meeting of the members.

I consider the closing of the club is unwarranted interference in our private lives.

I have known our Chairman for 26 years and he has always impressed me as being a fair and impartial man. It is therefore obvious to me that he must have been grossly misinformed to sanction this drastic step.

The morals of our Covenanted Staff has sunk extremely low in recent years. Actions such as this are unlikely to improve it.

Yours sincerely, R. Higham

Same date, reply to Higham from G.M.

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your P & C. letter dated 13th November and have noted with interest the comments and remarks you have to make, particularly those of the penultimate paragraph.

I may say that this letter was half expected from you, and I shall see to it that a copy is forwarded to the Board for their information and orders without delay.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, November 24th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*A rather sad letter from you written on a wet Sunday evening - I agree that Sunday evenings are sad (the Assamese would have a word for it!). I think it's something to do with school, I always remember feeling overcome by a sort of pleasant but heavy gloom after chapel on Sunday evening, in that case probably a combination of evensong and an empty stomach as we never had much to eat for lunch - but the nostalgic feeling has lasted and I always want to listen to music or poetry and brood.*

*I'm glad the work is interesting anyway, I shall certainly come and look at the Indian art and would also be helped by seeing your system of cross reference and filing - my little cards are already cram jam full and I shall have to reorganize them soon. I shant have much time for work for the next month or so as I have this young girl to entertain, I've sent for some books from Calcutta library so if they don't come or I think of anything I'll let you know.*



Daddy is getting me "The Memoirs of William Hickey" for Christmas, he was a contemporary of Warren Hastings and a new volume has just been brought out – by my friend Peter Quennell I think. Didn't realise he was a poet (Q) – I've borrowed the Penguin Book of Contemp. verse and he has a poem in it.

We are all shocked and saddened by the Kennedy affair,<sup>341</sup> without Television or wireless we haven't probably felt the full impact of it as you have at home but it does seem a fearful waste, and makes one wonder for the millionth time who is running this crazy world.

We had Father James staying with us at the beginning of the week, I would have been interested to talk it over with him but the Catholic answer is always the same and one envies them the discipline of their faith. Father J. had just come back from leave in Spain and had been told that if he came East again he would probably perforate his stomach as he has all sorts of awful things wrong with it – but of course he has come and was full of fun and stories – he is the nephew of a famous tenor Volpi<sup>342</sup> and told us the whole story of his (V's) career, he's a marvellous raconteur and acts (and sings) all the parts. I'm going to try and borrow a tape recorder next time he comes as he has a beautiful voice himself.

Also told us a long story about a father in Bombay who had promised to build a church and started to write to some American friends, after three years he had collected 5 lacs and the church is built, all beautifully decorated with Italian marble and big enough to hold two thousand people, and the money is still coming in. If he can do it, why can't other people?

The awful thing about all the help that comes to India is that half or more of it is wasted on setting up organisations which don't work – there are endless "Bureaus For Rural Development" etc which have large offices, staff, land rovers etc. but never go anywhere near rural areas, in Shillong we were always meeting them in the town taking the wives shopping or the children to school and everywhere you go there are buildings with "Institute of Agricultural Research" or "Government Veterinary Centre" in huge letters outside and doors and windows permanently sealed – whether its lack of organisation or (as alas one suspects more likely) sheer graft I don't know.

A typical and tragic case of inefficiency last week when a young couple and a friend drove into the Brahmaputra because the road block had been removed to show the road had been altered – the wife and friend were drowned – and apparently this is the second case, the other one happening nearly a year ago and still no notice or fence.

Our own little battle is still going on but we are now out of it - the Committee resigned and as far as we're concerned that's the end of it - but the whole valley is humming and I think the sound has penetrated to the Board at home as we have just had a telegram from them saying that the club is to be re-opened forthwith. We got quite a nice letter from Remnant saying how childish the whole thing was and for goodness sake grow up etc. to which we sent a dignified reply agreeing that the symptoms were childish but the principle at stake we felt was important. Rather reminds me on a tiny scale of the battle between the Stuarts and Parliament on the issue of the Kings position vis a vis the common law - in this case it is the G.M. who claims to be above the constitution with powers to interfere and bully in every sphere of our lives. I feel a bit sorry for him now actually, as he is just falling over himself to be nice to Daddy and it is a pitiful spectacle, he ought to go as he has lost the last little respect anyone had for him.

We forgot the whole thing last Sunday when we made our first expedition up the river, we took the Finneys and young Connell (the nice new assistant who is writing a book) and it was an added pleasure to see them enjoy it. Brenda Finney is a zoologist and took up lots of bottles and we spent a lot of time turning over stones and collecting the things underneath, I had no idea there was so much fascinating life among pebbles.

Daddy caught two small fish and it was as peaceful and gay with birds and butterflies as ever. We are seriously thinking of starting a Sunday club there and making a small bamboo

*hut so we can occasionally spend a night, but must first get permission from the military. I meant to go and beard the Colonel yesterday but something was wrong with the jeep.*

*In the evening we went up to Sonari to see a silly but funny film with Alfred Marks, I can see myself having to trail all over the countryside to the cinemas of every club when Rosemary is here, her father won't let her go out unless I'm with her. Am worried that she will be bored, though she must have had plenty of practice in amusing herself.*

*I haven't done much about Christmas, we are probably spending the day with the Merediths but I should do something for the lads here I suppose. I feel I would rather spend the money on the hungry and jobless. While digging a new nursery yesterday they unearthed what looks like the base of a stone pillar, and I am taking the malis out this afternoon to dig further before the whole thing disappears under tea.*

*Let me know when you go home and for how long - it will be little cabins on the landing for all I fear as the house is groaning at the seams or will be unless Beryl can help. Fiona's last letter was full of resolutions to live a more regulated life but she finds people come bursting in the whole time and stay half the night and all is as before. Anne will be quite close to you at Sutton Coldfield so will perhaps be able to come over occasionally.*

*Such a glorious day – as every day – I am heavier than I have been for the last fifteen years so crises seem to suit me, this weather certainly does.*

*With much love from us both, Mummy*

Special Meeting of Nazira Club held in the Club premises at 7.30 p.m. on 27th November, 1963.

Present: Messrs. J.R. Simpson, D.K. Macfarlane, A. Gupta<sup>343</sup>, D.Barkataki, Dr. T.W. Poole, J.R. Finney, I.A. Rufus, P.J. Casley, W.E. Dowsing, L.V. Woollett, G.K. Kalani<sup>344</sup>, R.C.C. Corps, R.P. Ross, T. Barbara, D.H.M.C. Romans<sup>345</sup>, C.A. Yates, A.I. Leetham, D. Barua, H.F.J. Featherstonhaugh, C. McMurray, M.A. Fitzpatrick-Robertson, R.G.G. Higham and L.S. Sawtell.

.....

Mr D.K. Macfarlane, who was in the Chair at the commencement of the meeting advised the members that the General Manager wished to address the meeting. He then vacated the Chair in favour of Mr J.R. Simpson.

Mr Simpson stated that he had received instructions from the Board of Directors to arrange for a meeting of all members of the Club and had accordingly asked Mr D.K. Macfarlane to convene the meeting he was now addressing. He welcomed members but regretted that there were so many absentees, noting that no members from either the Moran area or the Benhubor Company were present. He had hoped there would have been 100% turn-out.

Mr Simpson said the Board had asked him to advise members of two methods by which the Club may be run. However, before going into details he stated that he would like to express his regret for the part he might have played in the events of the past few weeks which had resulted in general unpleasantness and members being inconvenienced by a temporary closure of the Club. He also apologised especially to the members of the late Club Committee for any untoward action he might have taken that had caused friction.

Mr Simpson then explained the alternative methods of running the Club, regarding which members were required to vote, by reading a prepared extract of a letter received from the Board.

A meeting should be called by the Committee of all members to decide whether:-

A

Members wish the Club to remain under Company Management and financing, as now,  
or

B

That the Committee take over the Club on the following terms:

a) A survey of the buildings and amenities to be made at takeover.

A survey be made once a year thereafter and members of the committee to be held individually and collectively responsible for making good any deterioration. This would apply to the tennis courts, polo ground, golf course and cricket field, including the pavilion as well as the Club buildings and the fixtures and fittings.

b) The Company would be entitled to deduct from the salary of a Committee member equally any outstanding amounts under the above para.

c) In order to leave the Committee free to operate the Club as it wishes the Company will withdraw all its support, financial and otherwise.

d) A meeting shall be called at the end of the first and second years to decide whether members prefer the new regime. If the verdict should be "no" Committee members prior to handback will be personally and collectively responsible for outstanding debts.

The Board further advise that if A is selected by the members, the Club will come under direct Company Management for a 4 months interim period after which a duly elected Committee can resume control.

The Board further explain that when the term "direct Company Management" is used, they mean that a Club Manager or Steward will be appointed by the Company and who will be responsible to Mr Sawtell as Administrative Officer. The Board state that the Manager may be a member of the Company or someone appointed from outside the Company.

After hearing the foregoing a proposal was made at the meeting be adjourned for a week in order that members might give the matter some thought and this was carried.

Various members including Mr M.A. Fitzpatrick-Robertson and Mr R.G.G. Higham asked for further information regarding the situation which led up to the closing of the Club. Mr Simpson stated that if any member wished to raise queries on these lines, he should do so in writing when he would forward such letters to the Board for reply, as necessary. A question was asked as to whether an inquiry could be held into the matter when the Chairman and other Directors were here early next year. The question was also raised as to whether the Club subscriptions would be reduced pro-rata to the period when the Club remained closed.

Mr A.I. Leetham, Polo Captain, suggested that the Club Meet arranged for 7th December, 1963 be postponed and this was carried by a large majority of those present.

J.R. Simpson

NAZIRA CLUB, Nazira, 28th November, 1963

To

All full members of the Nazira Club.

I enclose herewith Notes of a meeting held in the Nazira Club last night.

In order to avoid the necessity of calling another such meeting, members should complete the voting form below and send it in a closed envelope, unsigned, to Mr. D.K. Macfarlane at Cherideo Purbut T. E. to reach him not later than the 5th December.

Only votes on the form bearing the stamp below [Assam Co. Ltd stamp] will be treated as valid.

J.R. Simpson, General Manager

.....

NAZIRA CLUB

SPECIAL VOTING FORM

With reference to the alternative methods of running the Club explained at a meeting held on 27.11.63 and as printed on the notes of that Meeting, dated 28.11.63,

I vote for Alternative 'A'

I vote for Alternative 'B'

(delete clearly the alternative for which you do NOT wish to vote).

Simpson to London, 3rd December 1963

I have now received advice on the voting from Mr. Macfarlane. 6 persons voted for 'A' and two for 'B'. 28 persons returned their ballot papers indicating that they were not in favour of either 'A' or 'B', a number of whom gave their reasons for so doing. This means that there were 8 abstentions, some of whom might have been on local leave. If the Board would like copies of the letters which were attached to certain of the ballot papers I will forward them for the Board's perusal. As the result is in favour of the implementation of 'A', I am arranging accordingly.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, December 7th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Crack of dawn and I'm trying to get my letter written in the swirly early morning mist, I have a fifteen year old guest and somehow find myself occupied from dawn to dusk in listening to Cliff Richard chatter or in otherwise occupying her. She has taken the dogs out for a walk now so I hope I can finish this.*

*Thank you for your letter. The work sounds fascinating, as you say the field is almost limitless, I find the same in my meagre way, I should know all about the different religious sects which figure largely in Indian history, and every character mentioned ought to be investigated, and then there's architecture and medicine and so on.*

*Actually I'm feeling most depressed about it at the moment as I've just had a letter from the library in Calcutta saying they can't supply any of the four books I wrote for as they are "out of print". All of them were on the library catalogue, so it's obvious that none of the books I want will be available. I feel like giving up, it is so hopeless trying to get any help here, I can see now why Indian students are so frustrated. I will make a list out for you and perhaps you can get a few of them – the trouble is I can't afford to buy them all as they will be expensive books and some of them I will probably need only to skim through.*

*Anyway enough of my tiny personal problems, Christmas is hardly the time to air them, I always find it a bit depressing these days to be indulging in orgies of eating and drinking when half the world is hungry and lonely and unwanted – this is not the Spirit I know, but it is the one time I would really like to go out and do something helpful and perhaps boring and unpleasant, but instead I always follow the old routine and sink in guilt and indigestion. While we're on the subject, I have sent a cheque for £35 to your bank, could you please send or give £10 to Anne for a present and pocket money, keep £10 for yourself for your birthday and Christmas and give Fiona £5 for her Christmas. The remaining £10 is for you and F. to use as you need during the hols (I have paid Granny for your keep separately). I hope this*

*will be enough, I am imagining that you have some grant left, let me know how that is going. I have a strong feeling you should get a suit, a nice one, perhaps on the never never?*

*We are spending Christmas day out, lunch with the Merediths and dinner with the Sehmers, rather a feeble effort but it will give us a good excuse not to attend the dreary celebrations in the Burra Bungalow. The Feud still goes on but the rebellion is following the classic pattern in that the rebels are now beginning to fight amongst themselves, some people think the club should be boycotted, others (like us) that it is up to the individual to decide, at least until the business is finally settled. Personally I'm not going again, but this is from choice as much as principle. Our little guest is very shy and seems fairly happy pottering about here though she is a restless creature, doesn't read or have any hobbies, she comes from such a sad background which I think I've told you, Fiona will anyway.*

*We bought a battery gramophone (which we are going to flog as soon as she goes) and a couple of records which churn out all day and I'm planning to give a small party for her when I can summon the energy. The river is a dead loss at the moment as Daddy is in such a state of nerves about whether we are offending the Nagas or the military that we spend our time arguing about how far we dare go. Last Sunday we arrived to find the military had just bombed it and were busy pulling huge stunned fish out so that was that, not that I mind about the fishing but it isn't even peaceful any more.*

*So one by one our pleasures are taken from us, though it is a pleasure just to be here at the moment, the weather is so wonderful and the garden looking a picture and full of birds. If I had my choice I'd never go out, the roads are hellish, huge great trucks thundering along knocking down everything in their path and clouds of dust and vast great pyramids of boulders by the roadside which in some distant era are going to be used to do the road up. They (the trucks) even managed to knock down and kill a rhino the other day, they belong to the Oil Company, and are really terrifying.*

*The family is back, so my peace for the day is over, I stayed up till midnight last night reading "The Unicorn" by Iris Murdoch, a fascinating book. My proof copy arrived several days ago but I haven't had time to correct it yet, as usual they have removed quite a lot of the choicest bits and drastically pruned the rest, very disappointing to find a carefully balanced sentence with the two most important words taken out but it's best not for me to argue, I suppose they know best.<sup>346</sup> My Peter Quennell has been busy editing William Hickey and writing a book on Shakespeare so I don't suppose he had anything to do with it.*

*Your books for Daddy have arrived and he is writing to thank you, I've read the Goshawk which is delicious but very sad, I wish I could write a mixture of T.H. White and Forster.*

*The day must be tackled now, have a mass of typing to do for Daddy about the club which I shall have to fit in somehow.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, December 12th 1963

*My dear Alan,*

*Daddy got his birthday greetings off yesterday he says, so I hope one of us will hit the nail on the head. I feel this should be a very auspicious year, 22 being my lucky number and the 22nd year of our marriage as well (Sir J. Frazer would have some crushing revelations on the subject of lucky numbers). Anyway, I hope you will have a happy day, Granny will see to the food side of it I know, and will not spend it wishing that someone who isn't there was. We shall be thinking of you and wishing as usual that we weren't separated again, half my life seems to have been spent sitting round moping about lost occasions. The only comfort we have is that in spite of almost continual separations we don't seem to have drifted too far apart as a family, in this case distance has lent freshness to our relationship I think, if Fiona*

*is around to read this she will have some caustic remarks to make on my laborious birthday philosophizing!*

*The happy thought has just struck me that you will all be together for a few days so that my Christmas letter won't have to be thrice repeated, it will arrive in a couple of days I hope. I haven't sent my immediate family cards I'm afraid, they arrived too late to send by Sea Mail! I have a vivid picture of Field Head at the moment with cooking smells and Christmas cards propped up among the Staffordshire cows and Fiona leaping about knocking nails into the beams for the holly and the usual panic about the lights and the decorations, which will be unearthed from the bottom of the compost heap eventually or the lowest box in the shed.*

*The nicest part was the walk across the dawn fields to church with pink frost and Hawkshead in a mist and Fiona going green and have to be chased out. One is inclined to forget the acres of greasy plates and tangerine peel under the beds for days afterwards.*

*Here nothing could be less festive, I bought some crepe paper yesterday and we shall make some paper chains and cellotape our cards together and Rosemary has brought down some pinecones which I plan to silver, but as we are spending the day out I don't quite know when our own spread will be*

*Obviously a letter of mine went astray but Fiona will tell you about R. – I have managed to rope in three other girls this morning and they have taken Cliff Richards out onto a rug and will I hope spend the rest of the day there.*

*We had an exhausting day yesterday trying to run down her brother who lives in Sibsagar, eventually found his house and while she was with him I rushed off to have a picnic by the big tank by the temples – was immediately surrounded by dozens of trousered cads from the local college to stare at the extraordinary spectacle and ask every detail of my life story. I then went to see my historian friend who teaches there and to show the dishes I had dug up, he said they were pewter but could not date them exactly, he is coming to look at my other ruin after Christmas, it is useless trying to dig while Rosemary is here as she is too young to concentrate for long.*

*Somewhere on route I picked up a spotty student and gave him a lift to Nazira, but it turned out to be a happy encounter as he gave me the catalogue of the British Council Library and they have several of the books I want which will last me until I can make further enquiries.*

*Would you like me to make any investigations on Assamese brand witchcraft or have you enough on your plate?*

*We spent both Saturday and Monday chasing some film that we still haven't run to earth, in fact this last week has been almost entirely occupied bumping along dusty roads and the car and I are both somewhat worn out but all in a good cause.*

*We are going to have a small barbecue party by the river on 28th and I'm just ordering yards of sausages, it won't be as much fun as the impromptu parties we used to have with the girls as the present batch of youths are a bit corny and the girls will all be fifteen and speechless but I shall stay with the sausages.*

*The weather continues glorious and the Chinese seem to be static but the river is rather ruined by the Nagas who shout rudely from the banks now that it belongs to them<sup>347</sup> and we expect showers of poisoned arrows any minute.*

*Sorry about the typing, now that I have got rid of Rosemary for a little I am being pestered by the kitten who thinks I tap at my typewriter especially so that she can leap at the keys. She is very sweet and funny but has obviously come to terms with the rats who after a slight lull are now in chewing form again.*

*This is a very boring birthday letter, I'm sorry, I haven't had time to work and our conversational level for the last week has stuck at pop stars and I feel slightly soggy mentally - but you know all the things I would like to say and how we are bursting with pride at your*

*achievements and full of confidence in your future. I wrote you a poem on your first birthday and feel faintly like writing another now, but my standards being higher I seldom attempt to reach them.*

*Much love & thoughts – Mummy*

The saga concerning the Nazira Club continued over the Christmas period and is reflected in letters until the end of March.

R. Higham, Suntok T.E. to J.R. Simpson, Esqr. 24th December 1963

Nazira Club

Dear Sir,

Thank you for circulating the results of the recent ballot as requested in my letter of the 20th Dec 1963. I note there were 28 invalid papers. While these may have been technically invalid, I understand with most of them this had been deliberately done to signify the voter's disapproval of both the Board's proposals, and many of them were accompanied by covering letters explaining this fact.

It is clear therefore that once again a decision has been forced on us which is repugnant to the vast majority of members.

In my letter of the 13th Nov 1963 I complained against the forcible closure of the Club, the changing of the Club's name, and the unprecedented interference by the Company in the running of our private Club.

As the Club was reopened before the due date, and its correct name brought into use again, I considered it only fair on the Board and you that I should attend the Club and do what I could to promote better feeling amongst the Members. As you know, this is what I did and I encouraged my Assistants to do likewise.

However in view of the present circumstances, and my strong feelings in the matter, I much regret I cannot continue to attend.

I have considered resigning from the Club, but I feel this would achieve no useful purpose and might even be detrimental to the Club. I have therefore decided to completely boycott the Club, and its amenities, until there has been a full inquiry by the Directors, at which all relevant correspondence, minutes of Club Committee meetings, and other records can be examined, and the genuine views of members – Junior as well as Senior – obtained.

I am advising you of my decision in writing, as I wish to make my attitude perfectly clear.

In order to facilitate your sending this letter to the Board I enclose one copy for your record, and one for each Director.

R. Higham, Suntok T.E. to F.J. Casley, Esqr. Club Manager, Nazira Club, 24th December 1963

Nazira Club

Dear Sir,

This is to advise you that as a protest to the implementation of the Board's Proposal 'A', against the wishes of the majority of the members of our private Club, I intend to completely boycott the Club, and its amenities, until there has been a full inquiry by the Directors.



It is with deep regret, and only after considerable thought, that I have made this decision. I wish to make it quite clear it is not in any way directed at you personally, or at the Club.

Copy to: The General Manager, Assam Co. Ltd., Nazira together with one copy for each Director.

To The Secretary, the Assam Co., Ltd, London, from J. Simpson, 31st December, 1963

Nazira Club Noted but I enclose the copies of letters written by Mr R.G.G. Higham to both the Club Manager and myself, as he has particularly asked for this to be done. For the Board's information I can advise that in addition to Mr. Higham's announced boycott, to the best of my knowledge three members have resigned from the Club. The boycott by certain members has not been confined to the Club but also to my tennis parties and Christmas Day party.

Again, to the best of my knowledge, the members who have resigned have been accepted as members of Moran Club. I should be glad if the Board would advise me whether, in the circumstances, such members are entitled to (a) the additional Company Allowance paid to our staff when resident in the Moran area and (b) if Polo players, whether they should continue to draw their Polo Pony Allowance. The members in question are resident in the Nazira Circle.

1964

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 1st January 1964

My dear Alan,

*This should be a philosophical letter full of speculations and resolutions but don't worry, it won't be. I'm half asleep after getting home at 3 a.m. this morning, we got inveigled into going to Sonari Club for the Hogmany dance and it turned into one of those whooping Sco'ish efforts which are slightly embarrassing, particularly in retrospect, not that we whooped but watching a whole lot of middle aged planters at it is almost as bad.*

*I'm afraid this letter is a week overdue, Christmas week simply got lost and I'm just surfacing, it ended in a barbecue party in our paddock as a farewell to Rosemary, we collected seven girls which must be an all-time record but they were mostly fifteen and the two that weren't tripped about in three inch steel heels and the net result was a flop, Daddy went to bed at nine and left me to cope with the whole dreary rabble, I've never felt so cold and tired and half of us gave up and came indoors to sit by the fire and listen to Segovia, one of whose records I've borrowed – have you heard him – superb guitar playing.*

*Rosemary left after the party to go back to Shillong, I felt very sad to see her go and hope the return to the hovel she lives in with her old father won't be too great a shock. She is typical of the tragedy of the British rule, – the Anglo-English community – the steel heeled girls were the same, their one aim in life, to which they are dedicated with terrifying predatory zeal, to marry an Englishman. It is tragic to see them coating their faces inches deep in powder and trying to use all the right catchwords and drink the right drinks, of all the messes we made of India that is probably the biggest.*

*Rosemary is very pretty and might make it, though she has no education at all, if only we could win the pools I'd whisk her home and try to repair some of the damage. Life seems quiet without her, and I must confess it is rather nice to be able to pick up my books again and have Beethoven in the evenings instead of Elvis, we have been leant a few nice records and though the gramophone isn't up to them really it is still a joy to hear good music again.*

*Our Christmas was the usual orgy of eating and drinking that I anticipated, and we had violent indigestion when we finally got home at one a.m. – as usual too we missed you all very much and wished we could have all been together up some river, the only possible place to celebrate in India, though why we call it Christmas I don't know, far better to say we're celebrating the winter solstice as the religious element is non-existent here.*

*I've been lent Graves's "The Greek Myths" which no doubt you will have read, fascinating though I find myself wondering if some of his conclusions aren't a little far-fetched if one had the scholarship to argue. The more I think about it the more I feel you ought to come out here for a year of your thesis and live amongst a community who are practising witchcraft and the mother goddess worship from which it sprang – would anybody give you a grant – or would they let you have your whole grant in a lump sum which would more than pay your passage and you could do some teaching and article writing to keep you going when you arrived. The primitive communities of Assam are being rapidly assimilated, Christianised and ironed out and now is the time to catch them, the Garos or Khasis as the two matriarchal societies would be the best bet, and very little organised study has been made of either of them.*

*I am going to join the Hakluyt society and will be able to get quite a few of my books from them, the ones I really want are the memoirs of the first three Moghul Emperors, Babar, Humayon and Jehangir – these have all been translated and edited by Beveridge but can't be borrowed from any library it seems, and I doubt if you will find them but your friend in the*

*Bodleian might know if there is any way I could get them. I particularly want the Babar-nama. We are going to form a historical association and read each other papers, at least that's the idea but like all ideas here it will probably peter out, we being some of my Assamese friends. Please note any theses you read or see on Assam as I have promised them that I will try to do some research for them when I come home though quite when I shall find the time I don't know only I do feel for them not being able to get at any reference books or manuscripts.*

*We resigned from the club from yesterday so I don't know what the next move will be, the Chairman is coming out in a couple of weeks and I suppose it will all be sorted out then. We have both lost interest in the whole thing and would be quite happy never to go to the club again.*

*It's so beautiful now, the compound a blaze of flowers and full of humming birds, if only it would last.*

*Do wonder how you all got on in Field Head or where you laid your heads, you are probably glad to be back to the peace of your own Oxford room. Let us know if you need money to tide you over until your next bit of grant comes in.*

*I've spent hours writing this, keep going off into a trance, your letter arrived on Christmas Eve as did five others so we had a lovely batch.*

*Much love & hopes for a happy year, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Jan 8th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a most amusing letter written after Christmas... Our gay life is over I'm thankful to say, and I've settled into my routine of work and walks with the dogs, it suits me so much better, though at the moment I'm have a slight session of amoeba again but nothing drastic.*

*Your wonderful parcel of books arrived last week, we were horrified to tot up and see how much you spent on them but they were very welcome and I didn't know which to read first. I have actually read "Arturo's Island" which is an absolute classic, quite unlike any childhood portrait I've read before, reminds me of "The Leopard" which I also loved though nobody else here did. Now I'm, half way through "The Nabobs" which is also fascinating and particularly so for me as I'm studying the period. Daddy is reading "Zorba" which he says is very good too, you can't imagine how welcome books are, especially now that we have resigned from the library, but this doesn't mean you are to spend your precious grant on sending us parcels please. I have sent you £20 this month but let me know if you want more.*

*I couldn't be more contented than I am at present from the moment Daddy brings me my morning tea in the cold mist at 8 I am doing things I like in the most beautiful surroundings. The garden is a blaze of dahlia and humming birds and Rosa my cat is skipping and pouncing about it too, adding her bit of grace & gaiety. Like you though I feel pangs when I think of Calcutta and remember the children picking over dustbins and fighting over what they find with starving dogs. I wish I had thought of collecting for Oxfam at Christmas, though hard-bitten planters would probably not have been very impressed.*

*We have a drove of directors landing on us this month, Campbell-Bannerman, the big noise in Lord Inchcape's group is apparently amongst them, we hear he is a Tough Nut so perhaps there is hope of a Golden Topee for us yet. Of course I would be terribly sad to leave India, but could do much more research work at home, silly though it seems.*

*It looks as if Nehru is cracking up, I wonder what that will mean, an Assamese friend of mine who was here the other day seems to think there will be a military coup and a dictatorship on the lines of Pakistan, mightn't be a bad thing if it means the end of the*

*corruption that is nullifying every effort at the moment. But judging by the way the military behave, and the endless parties they give on the funds presumably contributed for the Brave Jawans I wonder if that would be much improvement.*

*I am studying my Assamese fairly hard and soon I hope to go out into the villages and will try to collect some folk stories and anything I can on witchcraft. There is talk of starting a historical society too in Nazira but I don't know if it will come to anything.*

*We have got a new car, presumably part of the new programme to soothe us and stop us saying too much to the directors, but alas it is too late and nothing they can do will rub out the injuries and insults Daddy has had to put up with – the latest is to send a note round to all the clubs saying that Nazira will not be held responsible for any debts, dud cheques etc we may issue – this was signed by Daddy's assistant in his capacity of Club Manager – of course everyone is treating it as an enormous joke but you can see why we are in a prickly frame of mind.*

*The G.M. has a pull on the young lads at the moment in the shape of his 16 years old daughter who is quite attractive and out for her winter holiday, did I tell you about our barbecue party before Rosemary went, it was terrible. Never got going and I can't recall spending a longer colder evening, I'm sure that's where I picked up my tummy trouble. Rosemary sent a cheerful letter from Shillong, so I hope her stay here didn't unsettle her, I am still perplexed about what to do about her and feel a great sense of responsibility towards her, something will probably turn up to decide things one way or the other, a football pool or something...*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, January 19th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*No letter since Christmas, but this is probably to do with the prophet's hair, we are always seeing pictures in the paper of the vast pile of mail bags in the Calcutta post offices...*

*My amoeba have quietened down somewhat, the only thing that is now depressing me is that we are to have our Director Sir Owain Jenkins and his wife staying here for five days in February – I don't mind him but what on earth am I going to do with her, can't expect her to dead-head the dahlias and discuss Family Planning with reluctant coolie women which are my two main occupations. However it's an ill wind, and this particular one has blown some new curtains, a tin of paint and some much [needed] toilet requisites in my directions, things I've been asking for for years.*

*Daddy and I went on a shopping expedition to Dibru on Friday, the first time for years and as we made a pact not to argue we spent the whole days saying "Just as you like darling" so didn't get much done, but it was a nice outing with lunch and a glass of beer by the side of the club swimming pool and we got most of the requisites!*

*Our Chairman the Hon. Peter is out and staying at Jorhat, and we hear that he is reported to have said he has come to blow off his top, so it's just a question of seeing in which direction! Anyway we shall have a good chance to talk things over with the Jenkins, he was here for half an hour last year and I thought him charming and with a sense of humour which is the main thing.*

*I had my Assamese historian friend out on Saturday to look at my ruin, he says it is the top of a temple, and by the size of it must be quite a big one so I am all set to start scraping, not that I will make much progress on my own but the Finneys say they'll help and I might get some students along too.*

*Brenda Finney (wife of our Scientific Officer in John Lampitt's place) is very interested in fish farming, so if you have any pamphlets on this or can give her any addresses she would*

be very grateful. She has just taken her B.Sc. and is very frustrated that she can't do anything to help here, we are trying to get her a teaching job if possible, but the lethargy and vagueness of everyone is unbelievable. They all think it's a terribly good idea for her to teach, but when you try and pin them down to something definite they ease away into total ambiguity.

I went on an expedition to have tea in a village last week, was rather surprised when I found the dear old Assamese lady entertaining me was called Ruth Andrews, a Baptist, and descendant of one of our General Managers! I am going to paint her, and will try to get some folk lore at the same time.

My other historian friend is writing a thesis on Folklore and Mythology for some degree, and is giving me the names of various books. His chief reference is the fourth Veda which is full of magic and witchcraft, but I suppose there is a limit to the scope of your studies, and you have to stick to a country and period? I wonder how you are getting on and if you have achieved a sense of direction. I'm reading Christopher Hill at the moment and agree that he is wonderfully clear and interesting, particularly the second part of the book where he takes various characters and through their writings illuminates the scene, I am thinking of copying the idea if I ever get my book written – at the moment I don't see much chance of it, haven't had a word from the library about the books I sent for three weeks ago. I see Rosebery was chosen as the best Biography of the year by the D.T.<sup>348</sup> which is jolly good, have you read it?

My talking mynah is chirping up and making little contented noises to himself and seems pleased to see me, I am going to make him a big cage round a tree and when his wings have grown will let him go.

Daddy and I had a lovely peaceful day up the river yesterday, didn't fish, just sunbathed and watched kingfishers and slept. As usual the cold weather has nearly gone by without us doing any of the things we meant to, but now that it is Nagaland we don't know what the position is or who to get permission from.

It is so beautiful here now, wish we could waft you all out for a week or two away from the fog and smog, is Fiona smoking heavily, I do wish someone could impress on her to stop, we both have. Please let us know if you want more money next month.

With much love from us both, Mummy

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, January 27th 1964

My dear Alan,

Thank you for a letter when you returned to Oxford, I expect you have quite settled in with your witches again and Christmas a dim memory...

I think the idea of commuting between the Lakes and Oxford is wonderful, Daddy says he would love to go back and watch cricket in the parks and I can't wait to get my hands on those Moghul theses. Dr Bhuyans book<sup>349</sup> I have, he is still alive though very old, I hope to meet him soon. There seems to be a sort of revival of interest in the Moghul's, I see there is a big exhibition of their art and handwork in America, perhaps I can cash in on it but I've got a feeling someone much more knowledgeable and influential is going to pip me at the post. Two books from the National Library arrived a couple of days ago, but I have hardly had time to open them, maddening, I've been waiting a month for them and now they come when I have the Leetham children coming to stay, and shortly afterwards the aristocracy.

We had a hectic day yesterday, a holiday and I had asked the Highams to lunch and the Sehmers and their children turned up too and we finally got rid of them all at 8 p.m. Daddy spent most of the day roaring round the lawn with the children on the back of the scooter, he also made paper boats and swallowed yards of paper for their amusement so felt quite ill by the end of it all, I just tramped and talked and had hissing conversations with the cook and

*then couldn't sleep last night, I don't know why it is so much more difficult having people here with hundreds of servants than when one copes single handed at home.*

*On Saturday we went to Sonari to the film, a ridiculous thing called "Because They're Young" about an American high school where all the children roll up driving their own Cadillacs and no cliché is missed but I quite enjoyed it for that reason. The Finneys came up in our old car which they had borrowed from Nazira workshops and on the way home they suddenly came to a steaming halt in front of us, literally bubbling and hissing, and it turned out they hadn't had any water in the radiator from the start. So Daddy and John had to crawl about getting water out of a ditch in a cigarette tin while Brenda and I read our horoscopes out of a magazine I'd borrowed. The first time our little old car has broken down and we felt so sorry for it. the road to Sonari is soon going to be impassable as they are about embark on tarmacking it, so we shall then be free of any club life at all, happy thought.*

*I have spent two afternoons this week digging at my new ruin, very slow work as I spend most of the time clearing away the mounds of mud I dislodge, there is definitely a wall emerging but it'll take me years to unearth it and sometimes I feel I would be better employed doing something else as I doubt if there is more than a shell left.*

*I read "The Spy Who came in from the Cold" this week and thought it very good and most moving, refreshing to find someone with the courage to denounce spies instead of glorifying them a la Fleming. My little guest Rosemary sent me down two poetry books from Shillong from her father's collection of ancient books I imagine, Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, the latter quite wonderful with some I had never read, I think he moves me more than any poet, I can hardly bear to read some of his poems even though I nearly know them by heart. To think that a whole generation like him died to make the world safe for the Beatles.*

*My last peaceful day as the kiddies arrive this evening, I love having children around but wear myself out entertaining them every waking minute, so long as I can keep them out of Miranda's reach I shall be happy.*

*Sir O. and Lady J. also arrive in Nazira to-day, so the last stage of the battle is about to start, he is a very shrewd character and I think will be able to size up the situation fairly well in spite of all the telegraph poles being painted white in his honour. I don't know what she is like, I just hope she likes a simple life with adenoidal bearers offering her cold food which is what we have to offer – actually it is quite lovely here now, the garden is a blaze of colour and after winter at home I imagine all she will want to do is sit and stare at it...*

*I'm afraid as usual this is a dull letter, I'm sleepy to add to everything, I was most distressed to see that T.H. White<sup>350</sup> has died.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Feb 6th 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*What a surprise and a thrill to get your enclosures from that agent<sup>351</sup>, and how sweet of you to have had faith in my book – in fact the only person who has read it! I will write to the agents of course & see if something can be fixed to please the publishers when I get home, though I'm loath to just "extract" the stories, if that's all they want can produce lots more but there so many books of legends & stories I would have thought. Anyway, it is very encouraging & very sweet of you, Daddy is terribly bucked too. I have quite lost interest in "fame" but am still interested in money I fear, I justify it by pretending it's not for myself but that's rather roundabout as I will get the pleasure from giving it away!*

*I haven't had much time for my Moghuls this week having the Leetham kiddies to entertain, we spent a lot of it paddling in the mud at the edge of the tank & catching tiny fishes, one day I took them & Brenda Finney up to Sibsagar to try & get her a job at the college there, we*

*looked round the museum which was a mixture of lovely old copper plate grants & tiles & hideous glazed replicas of famous objet d'arts sent from Delhi, they were delighted with Brenda & we drank endless cups of black treacly tea while plans were made. She is to teach Biology etc, the only snag is the college seems to be shut half the year, anyway she feels less frustrated now & it'll be a great boost to company prestige.*

*We took a picnic lunch afterwards to the old palace where the children teetered from the battlements & we were surrounded by college cads in a flash & much loud speculation as to whether I was Brenda's mother & the children were my grand offspring! There's a fishery research place at the college so she hopes to help there too.*

*The night before they left the children's ayah had a heart attack or something similar, anyway it was quite frightening as she was palpitating all over the place, and the Dr Babu took ages to come & I couldn't find any brandy which was just as well as it was the wrong thing. I was relieved to dump her in hospital next morning where they found nothing wrong apparently, all "nerves".*

*Next Monday we have the Directors arriving, my only sane servant has collapsed with scrub typhus so I am feeling mildly hysterical at the prospect, we hear rumours that they are on our side over this club row but will know more when we meet them. Lady J. is reported to be fond of birds & flowers so I feel must be nice.*

*I heard from the Hakluyt Society which I am joining & that will help a lot with my books. When do you go to Borstal? Thought of spending about ten days in Oxford after I arrive, but could arrange it for later if it suits you better. I'm getting so excited about it already, and getting away from this crazy, petty, backbiting atmosphere. Just read "The Towers of Trebizond" by Rose Macauley which I loved. Am keeping your books & making them last. Hope you are less lonely, the penalty of the scholarly life. Much love, Mummy.*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo T.E., February 13th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for writing so nobly when you must be fed up with paper and pen by the end of the day, but the sight of an Airgraph in the dak bag makes my day. I am sitting back sipping cold milk and feeling blissfully relaxed with my guests gone and no more conversations to make or meals to plan and then apologise for. Actually they were both very nice and good company but it is always a strain having people for days on end, particularly here when you don't have anything to offer in the way of entertainment.*

*I took her up to my ruin one evening and we scrabbled about with clouds of mosquitos biting her through her nylons, and another day I took her on a picnic to visit the ruins of Sibsagar and we ate lettuces at the elephant house and were pursued from ruin to ruin by two terrible students with a box camera which they insisted on using on us, coming very close and aiming it at our calves so they will be disappointed with the result. I had the Finneys to dinner one evening and it turned into quite a gay event in spite of the fact that they are so young, but they have lots to talk about and are fresh and charming.*

*Brenda will be delighted with all the fish information, she has now started lecturing at Sibsagar college twice a week and there is a fish farm there right on the spot so she can give them a hand with it as its pretty neglected looking. I'm very glad she has got something to do and she is thrilled and they are thrilled with her so let's hope the hot weather wont damp everyones enthusiasm. I would have liked to do something like that but not having a degree they wouldn't have taken me, anyway its twice as far from here.*

*We both let off steam separately on the subject of Simpson and they were very sympathetic, Lady J. said they thought he was just about round the bend but unfortunately Sir Owain is the most junior Director and hasn't much influence with Remnant. Anyway Remnant arrives to-*



*day and they will be thrashing it out over the week end and we should know something fairly soon. Sir O. describes Nazira as a cross between a sacred cow and white elephant which is very apt, he wants to get rid of it altogether which is an excellent idea and would save endless money and if they can knock some sense into Remnants senile old brain that is probably what will happen.*

*The Jenkins live close to Billy and Julia and Billy was on a shoot with them quite recently, I'm surprised J. hasn't captured them for her social circle being rich, elegant and titled, I must say I was a bit shattered when I first saw her, immensely tall and impeccable, but under the Dior and blue hair very simple and ordinary.*

*All my servants were in the last stages of the Ramzan fast which made them more inept than ever and my only good bearer suffering from scrub typhus but we were determined that they should see us as we are and not try and put on airs and graces we don't possess. The previous people who had them to stay, the Barries, gave cocktail parties endlessly for them, but after they left Alec Barrie<sup>352</sup> was carted to hospital with a burst duodenal ulcer so it can hardly have been worth it.*

*The next excitement is the flower show to-morrow, I am exhibiting everything I've got which isn't much at the moment as it is heating up rapidly and all my flowers wilting and dropping their petals, am also going to put in a floral decor, Daddy has made me a vast great wooden box for it but I've had no time to practice so only doing it for the fun.*

*After that I'm looking forward to sinking back into my rut and picking up the Moghuls again, I don't think my article is ever coming out.*

*I had a letter from John Lampitt yesterday, he is getting married at Stratford on August 8th so we might fit that in with my Oxford visit and then I'll go on to meet Daddy at Amsterdam afterwards.*

*It's getting very sultry weather and I'm thankful I haven't the whole hot weather to face but we shall probably get rain soon to give us another breather. Also heard from Tim Edye from Africa where he is doing lots of sight-seeing in between his job and thoroughly enjoying it, was vastly impressed by the Kariba dam, sad that such an exciting and beautiful country is full of death and bitterness, if only we could rub out the last two hundred years and all the immorality of colonialism but we should probably write as much beastliness on the slate again.*

*I wrote to the agents and said I would be coming home in July and would be glad to discuss my book with anyone who is interested, tried not to sound too Keen, slightly cool and offhand but not too, hope something comes of it.*

*I envy you your life, but don't ruin your eyes – let us know how much you need for March  
Much love – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, February 22nd 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter yesterday, I agree that it would be a bit wasteful to keep your flat on all summer if you won't be going back before October. I will definitely come and keep it warm while you're at Borstal and then stay around till Daddy arrives home at the beginning of August, I can do my visiting then. D. wants to avoid Bank holiday week end so was planning to arrive about August 8th, but this might be difficult if you want to hand the flat over from the 1st. Would they let you keep it on for half that month do you think? If not Daddy will have to come a week earlier, at the end of July. Let us know. If you have a friend who will take it till September it might be then worthwhile to pay the month's rent so as to save the trouble of looking around for something else, and we could pop down occasionally during September and Fiona might like to too.*

*My plans are to go straight to Manchester, where I hope both F and A will be and after a few days there onto Field Head and then down to Oxford on 11th, or perhaps a day or two earlier so as to see something of you, but I don't know how much room there is? Have to visit my publishers! They say they want a sort of junior Arabian Nights, sounds a pretty corny idea to me but still if that's what they want I suppose they know best. There is certainly a limitless supply of folk story and legend here.*

*I have rather a miserable week as I lost Rose on Sunday evening, we were out for the day and got back at 9.30 p.m. to find her gone, I did not worry as I thought she was up on the roof but she has never come back and we have men out beating the jungles and searching everywhere. I think she must have been taken by a jackal or a large hawk, I feel it was my fault as I forgot to tell the servants to shut her up and this has made me even more miserable. She was the most affectionate and intelligent cat I've ever had and was with me all day so there isn't a moment when I don't miss her, so we go on, oh for the Buddhist non attachment. I've buried myself in my work to try and stop thinking about it, also because I haven't had time to do any for weeks and have had a cross letter from the Calcutta Library.*

*On Wednesday Daddy went into have a chat with the Chairman, the Hon. Remnant on the subject of the club, and to-day there is to be a meeting at which he is to put forward his proposals which are that the administration of the club be entirely divorced from the General Manager – so we have Won. However the club thing is just an expression of the feeling of frustration and dislike we all have for him and his Secretary and the company will never run until both of them go. There is to be a cocktail party this evening to which we are all going, the first time we have been in the club for months, I suppose we shall now have to join again which is rather a bore.*

*We are going to spend the week end with the Rosses afterwards, they are now in Moran district and Daddy will get a game of golf which is the only thing he misses. I staggered up to Jorhat with lots of flowers last Sunday but they were all mashed and bent when I arrived, except my snapdragons which won first prize, the judging was very peculiar and there was lots of cheating.*

*We bought ourselves two records, the first of our collection, Brahms piano concerto played by Clifford Curzon and Beethoven's 4th, both ordinary I expect but they sound wonderful to us after Radio Ceylon and last, at least one record does, from the time we get our letters and papers till dinner. Still having peculiar weather, almost monsoonish with storms and hail and at the moment I'm sitting by the fire, in the morning, unheard of for this time of year.*

*Glad the witches are absorbing, the funny thing is that almost any subject is if you start examining it at depth, Brenda's snails are absolutely fascinating when you realise what goes on in their stomachs, I didn't even know snails had stomachs before.*

*She did her first days lecture at the College last year, was introduced to her "form" of 100 by a long lecture from the Vice Chancellor saying what a great day this was for them getting a European lady from the Assam Co and how honoured they were etc, for hours he rambled on while she grew scarlet, she then gave them a lecture on evolution of which they had never heard though they were a first year degree course in Zoology! So she is going to have her work cut out, we told all the Directors we could what a good example this was and how much Anglo Assamese relations would profit from it and hope this will nip in the bud any schemes Simpson has of stopping her, he will make it as difficult as possible over transport I know but we will lend her our car if necessary.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, February 29th 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*A postal holiday yesterday so your letter has not reached us yet, but a catalogue from Blackwells arrived and I have been pouring over it and covering it with ticks in red ink. It has a lot of books I want but most of them are very expensive and I shall see if I can find them in libraries before launching out and buying them. One I would like though, perhaps for an early birthday present?!, is Berniers journal of the Moghuls<sup>353</sup>, I'll look up the number later. Thank you so much for sending this, little by little I shall manage to read everything though it'll take years.*

*I'm very happy as Rose has come back, she arrived in the middle of the night ten days after she disappeared, very thin and a bundle of nerves with all her self-confidence gone and all her playfulness too poor Rose, she has obviously had a wretched time but where we can't imagine, anyway we are feeding her up and it is lovely to have her at my heels all day again, she is a very dog like cat. This has lightened my week considerably, not that it has been dark, very quiet and back into the old rut again which suits me.*

*I've been working on some more folk stories and have written to someone at Gauhati who is an expert so they will come pouring in I expect. Dr Verrier Elwin who wrote that nice letter about you died suddenly last week which was sad as I had hoped to meet him next time I went to Shillong. I didn't realise that he had been a Fellow at Oxford and gave it up to become a disciple of Gandhis and it was Gandhi who sent him to spend his life among the tribes. He had also worked for a bit at trying to reconcile Hinduism and Christianity but was buried with Buddhist hymns being sung around him – a man after my own heart and it is sad we never met.*

*We had a fairly hectic week end as it was the Company Cocktail party on Saturday and afterwards we went to spend what was left of the night with the Rosses and Sunday too. Before the party there was a meeting of all club members and Remnant was there to answer questions and get things straightened out, he started by being frightfully fatherly and affable and telling people not to be afraid, just ask him anything they liked, he wouldn't bite, but the first person who asked him a question he flew off the handle and looked as if he was going to have a heart attack so you can't win can you? He finally went off in a cloud of clichés and left us a long drivell about being "decent chaps" and pulling our weight etc. so nothing really has been achieved it seems. We shall see what happens next.*

*The party was the usual screaming match in a hot smoky room, nothing memorable said that I remember though one talked and talked for hours. Afterwards we had a terrible drive to the Rosses who live in Moran at the moment<sup>354</sup> through teaming rain and over main roads slippery with mud and blinding with lorries driving too fast, I never thought we'd arrive. Sunday was quiet and pleasant with golf and a beer and then a sleep till it was time to leave, I have never been to that bungalow before and liked it and have persuaded Daddy to let me have an Assamese tiled floor in my new Air Conditioned room but I daresay when the digging time comes he will change his mind.*

*It is warming up and spring is here, not the light crisp spring of home but a heavy, warm scented affair full of falling leaves from the rubber trees and the screeching of birds among the silk cotton flowers, and mulberries.*

*Our wedding anniversary to-morrow, we shall probably see it in in Jorhat club as we are going up to a play there this evening, an arrangement we made in an expansive mood and are regretting but it is in a good cause I think. Sir Paul Gore Booth the U.K. High Commissioner gave a party there last night to which we were invited but as I would have found nothing to say except to ask why his fellow diplomats make our position even more difficult by being so tactless at the U.N. And why he and his chums made such a hash of the Chinese invasion we decided it wasn't worth going, anyway we couldn't face trekking all that way two days running. This play will be our last social engagement for a long time I hope, it*

*is a comedy and I hope won't be as unfunny as a lot of amateur dramatics are but we shall laugh as hard as we can because it's very enterprising of them.*

*I have just finished "Zorba the Greek" which is fascinating, a most unusual book and a wonderful character study. Have still got "The Grapes of Wrath" and the Evelyn Waugh study of Ronald Knox left.*

*I have sent £30 for this month but let us know how things go and when you get your next grant. I hope your time at Lee Abbey is truly reviving, is it a high church establishment or non-denominational? I hope to be taken round one of the local monasteries soon, establishments for the priests of the religion of Sankara Deva whose life story I wrote an article on once, I think you read it, a purified non-idolatrous form of Hinduism with Krishna as the one god.*

*With much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 7th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, hope the £30 will help towards your overdraft and you will be financially as well as spiritually boosted by now, but let us know about the money. I wonder if rest from responsibility in beautiful surroundings with fellow spirits is really a good way to find satisfaction. I have a feeling that the sense of well-being it gives would be only temporary, and it is hard, boring frustrating acts of renunciation that are truly fulfilling. However you have tried this course before and found it stimulating so there must be something to be said for it – the ideal of course is when one has a centre of rest within and doesn't have to take "courses" of it, but this is very difficult to achieve, particularly in the hurly burly of making ones way in the world and so on.*

*I'm glad your work is coming on, more than can be said for mine as I am out of books at the moment, but I think I will have to get down to a job which I've been avoiding, Indian History down to the Moghuls of which I only have the sketchiest idea. We went up to Jorhat on Thursday and I scoured the shops for Assamese folk stories but without success, hope the man I wrote to in Gauhati will answer, not that there is any shortage of Indian stories but it is the original ones I'm looking for.*

*We bought two records, the "Eroica" symphony and Shubert's Unfinished and Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony – the Beethoven is wonderful but we aren't so pleased with the other, one very hackneyed and the other just "pretty" it seems, but we shall probably change our minds. There is very little choice here. Now we have four records which is a start and makes our evenings more enlivening. Our shopping trip was really just an excuse for an outing, I got a couple of bits of material and a tube of oil paint and Daddy did a bit of company work and we had lunch at the club and so home, the cotton trees are flowering and very beautiful, great gobs of scarlet and orange and white like sealing wax, and full of birds. Wish I was home though with the daffodils taking the winds of March, I resent every spring I have to miss from my "little store" – whats the betting that when I have the daffodils I will be pining for the silk cotton?*

*Am pretty content at the moment, except for thinking of all those thousands of refugees in the Garo Hills<sup>35</sup> and wishing I could go and do something to help, as most of them are Christians the Catholics and Baptists will be there but what all of them will do I can't simply imagine. Pakistan is behaving very badly it seems, the Finneys went to Cachar last week to a garden on the border and guns were fairly bristling and the shade trees full of bullets, provocative is the word for it. Poor old Assam if it isn't the Chinese it's the Nagas and if not them the Pakistanis, being rich, lazy and bottled in is a fatal combination.*

*Oil wells seem to be springing up all over the place, but this isn't doing the Assamese much good as technicians are pouring in from outside, Sibsagar is seething with Sikhs, Russians and Bengalis who are taking over all the contracts, the A's fault largely as they are impractical dreamers living either in a glorious past or an impossible future.*

*I can't remember if I told you about the play at Jorhat, it was a rather ancient comedy full of fairly corny jokes but it was well done and most people enjoyed it and so did I really. We didn't get home till 3.30 a.m. though, it is nearly two hours driving and the man who has the key to the level crossing gate shuts it and goes to sleep at about 11 it means hurdling over and banging on his door and then waiting for another twenty minutes while he finds the key and rings up the station in case there's a train anywhere near – the result of all this being that we spent our anniversary Sunday feeling cross and tired.*

*I read "The Castles and the Crown"<sup>356</sup> which came from the Nazira library and I only kept for a day, it was excellent, I think the teaching of history through personality instead of events would be an advantage at least a combination of the two instead of the "cause-and-effect" method which still seems to be used – as half the causes had different effects in different parts of the world this is illogical as well as dull. For instance the plague was always cited in English history as the cause of the rise of the middle classes, but in other places, particularly the east, plagues and famines had the exactly opposite effect. It seems to me that history is as wildly unpredictable as the people who make it, and should be taught as such, starting with the people. Anyway that is how my history will be written if it ever is.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 15th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*I have another young guest and find it hard to get time to write, another Anglo Indian girl, her father is engineer to the company and she's a nice child and very easy to entertain but as she is teaching herself to type my letter writing has got somewhat neglected. I have one of yours to thank you for...*

*You will have heard from Fiona, I am torn between disappointment that she isn't going to finish her course, and approval at her sense of responsibility and desire to do something useful, I've told her to write to various organisations like the Pestalozzi place to see if she can get in, I really don't think I can ask Daddy to start training her in something else though as she will definitely not get another grant!*

*While I think of it, do you know of any crammer establishments where one can take "A" levels? The Poole's boys are at a school which seems to be crumbling round their ears, and Tom wants to send them to a crammer (boarding) where they can take O and A levels, George in Maths, Chemistry and Physics. He doesn't much mind where it is as long as it is boarding so that he can draw the educational allowance. It is very upsetting for them to have to change at this age, George is nearly 18 so hasn't any time to lose.*

*I wonder if you are snow bound and gale wrecked like the rest of England, it will kill all the flowers and blossom I suppose, I hope the A.P's aren't suffering too much as they don't seem to be very fit.*

*Here it is hot, not unbearably but one sweats when one walks and the ground is brick hard and my flowers panting almost visibly by mid-day.*

*We took Jill up the river yesterday and it was lovely, the water warm enough to sink into in ones clothes and then dry off on the hot pebbles. No sign of the Nagas who have been very rude and troublesome since they got their Nagaland, and lots of lovely birds. We watched for ages a thing we've never seen before – masses of cormorants forming a sort of flotilla and driving fish towards the bank where rows of egrets were waiting to help them eat them, the*

*confusion was terrific, the cormorants diving through the egrets legs, all very beautiful with the black and the white of the birds reflected in the green water. One of the many times we wished we had a telescopic lens.*

*Tony Connell one of our young assistants has two fishing eagles he took from their nest and is training a la Goshawk, it'll be interesting to see if he succeeds, he is mad on animals and has already got a zoo of them, three monkeys, a deer, four horses and two dogs to date. He is also mad on poetry and is writing a book so a great favourite of mine as you can imagine.*

*On Saturday I took Jill to Sonari to see "The treasure of San Theresa" which I think is the worst film I've ever seen but quite funny as a result, today is another film at Nazira but we aren't members yet so I'm sending her off on her own. She is so pathetic, she had never seen a paper pattern before and is absolutely thrilled because she has cut out and made two nightdresses for herself, she said to me this morning "Have you ever been on a beach?" in such a wistful voice. Someone else to worry about!*

*I wonder what the result of Nehru's retirement will be, as long as that crook Menon<sup>357</sup> doesn't get in, something drastic really must be done though about the corruption all over the country, I really don't think democracy is right for India yet, they need some sort of benevolent dictator; the new budget is a slight help to us as far as we can see but we aren't counting our benefits until we see them.*

*I had a letter from my folklore professor and he has given me the names of various books only one of which I've been able to find so far but I haven't really had a chance to search properly.*

*No sign of life from the National Library. The club row seems to have been solved at last and there is a new committee headed by Robert Higham so we are joining again, but the anti-Simpson feeling is still running high, we hear such awful stories it makes one shudder, but what can one do? He certainly isn't any the happier for it. What is it that urges people on to make more money than they can possibly want or have use for?*

*Lunch time, sorry for a dull scribble,*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 24th Cherideo 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*Two letters from you (the first took 13 days) and also the book for Brenda which arrived yesterday and which I know she'll be thrilled with. The college she teaches in has a fishery place just next door so I'm sure she could work in some sort of project with her lectures in zoology. I browsed through it and found it very interesting if involved, the thing here is to get through the blanket of apathy that smothers every new idea and also try to collar some of the money that is supposed to go into rural Development but in fact goes straight into the various ministers' pockets.*

*I have been re-reading the Bhagavad Gita (got the paperback edition by Isherwood but the best part of it is Huxley's introduction) and its insistence that the action should be disassociated from its fruit, and work should be done without any thought of reward or result is the only answer here. I feel it is an extremely comforting philosophy anywhere, and rids one of the feeling of frustration one so often has that work isn't "leading" anywhere. The perennial philosophy is for me, but I find myself quite unable to meditate, simply cannot rid my mind of all the thoughts that clutter it up and when I try am simply conscious of the effort and nothing else. Perhaps one day I shall reach that beautiful pose between action and inaction like the lotus leaf that rests on the water but is not wetted – the "holy indifference" of the Christian mystics. T. S. Eliot has borrowed most of his ideas on the subject from Indian*

*thought and writing I'm sure, that bit you quoted to me could almost have been a bit of Buddhist psalm.*

*I hope your week at Lee Abbey sent you back to your witches a New Man, I was interested in your interview with Trevor-Roper, I can understand why he is unpopular but he writes so well, I have cut out and kept all his articles on the Rise of Christendom. My history if it ever gets written will be trivial and feminine, I haven't the knowledge or insight to see grand movements, it all seems capricious and unpredictable to me. They're taking so long to print my article I'm wondering if the proof copy ever got back to them.*

*We had a fairly hectic week end with the Rosses staying for the Rugger match (wild enthusiasm over that as you can imagine) and the Lobbans for lunch on Sunday as well. I quite enjoyed having them all but it's a bit of an effort with my old cook, I suggested he was getting on and he said he was rather, the first sahib he worked for was Dr Winchester<sup>358</sup> who, we discovered, left Assam in 1903! I am getting another cook in a month or two but feel a brute as this old boy tries so hard and has fourteen children none of whom seem to have jobs but I shall give him a bit every month to try and help.*

*I've had two school prize givings in the last few days both of which I had to make Assamese speeches at. However I have a sort of set speech which I add a few frills to and I don't think they understand much anyway but like to see me standing up and making a fool of myself! I've said I'll go down to the school and give them a hand with English lessons but I don't know if I can really do much, they read Wordsworth and Shelley before they are capable of understanding Mother Goose and the result is so chaotic one would have to start again from scratch to get anywhere. The whole system of education (donated well-meaningly by us) needs a complete overhaul, the only people who can teach are the Catholics.*

*We have Father James coming to us this evening, this is holy week and he is rushing round trying to give services to all his communities and I'm sure will drop dead one of these days as he has every conceivable thing wrong with his insides.*

*Jack Simpson has phlebitis, the clot thing I had, but seems to be getting better rather more rapidly than most people had hoped, we have rejoined the club but haven't been back there yet, I suppose we shall have to make the effort soon.*

*I think you under-estimate Fiona's ideals, she may be bored with Manchester but I think it goes deeper than that, she genuinely wants to fulfil herself in a way she feels is more worthwhile – I think most women do but it takes years to realise it usually and by then they have got immersed in other things. I've told her to write to various places for advice and also see if she can't find something to do that would fit in with her art, it is the round of coffee drinking and parties that gets her down I think.*

*The £30 is not to be paid back, the £100 extra we said we could give you still has about another £40 to run so I'll send another £20 for April as I don't know when your grant will arrive, unless you'd like more? I wonder how much you could get an old car for nowadays, though driving round Oxford is somewhat of a nightmare, still it would be nice in the summer and wouldn't be tied to weekends. Have a look round, we still owe you a 21st birthday present.*

*Much love from us both – Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, March 31st 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*I don't know what has happened to Roe, I wonder if the proof copy ever got back to them, but surely they would have let me know if it didn't? If it doesn't come out soon perhaps I should write and ask, they may be having difficulty getting illustrations. I'm sending another batch of folk stories home with the Higham children at the end of the month, the agents are*



very nice and helpful and say they are sure that if this publisher falls by the wayside they can find another.

Can't get any sense out of the National Library, I've just read a book on the Mutiny in which he acknowledges the help given by its curators but he obviously had more winning ways or perhaps introduction. It is a vivid book, resting on a mass of new material from diaries and letters but never misses to mix a metaphor or produce a sun like molten brass or the sound of bugles smiting the ear drums and has some perfectly terrible "O" level common errors of the English Lang. It surprises me that such obvious howlers can get past proof readers and such. Still I enjoyed it for its impartiality and because it was all about a part of India I know, it was called "The Sound of Fury" by Richard Collier.

We made our first visit to Nazira Club for five months yesterday, can't say it was a rapturous experience but still we must try and raise some enthusiasm I suppose, the film "Pepe" was disappointing though there was a nice white horse in it. I made an effort to be nice to the Simpsons, she is really rather pathetic and I feel sorry for her but even in ordinary circumstances we have little in common and with the sense of strain between us conversation is a terrible grind

The Finneys are both very interested in the fishery book and Brenda seems to think she might be able to do something with it, they neither of them keep well unfortunately and have constant stomach upsets which will probably prejudice them against staying, Brenda has now learnt twelve of the 56 letters of the Assamese alphabet and thinks she is making vast progress.

It was Holi as well as Easter this weekend but I'm afraid neither made much impact, we had Father James staying with us last week for a couple of days, not quite as gay as usual as he isn't well and drives himself on to do and eat impossible things in villages and I'm sure will kill himself. He was saying the present Pope [Paul VI] is even more go ahead than John, though in a quieter way, and there is a strong move to remove the cassocks of priests and make them into ordinary men in appearance anyway, as well as introducing the vernacular into services and other things, a pity they didn't think of all these earlier and there wouldn't have been a reformation and how much simpler (but duller) history would have been.

I was interested in the witchcraft article, there is masses of that sort of thing here, but if you are thinking of living in a primitive community the Mediterranean would be more comfortable, here it would take years to learn the language, but one constantly gets the feeling that if only there was someone around who could organise, the intentions are there and often the money but everything is frittered and muddled away.

A U.N. expert on poultry came to Jorhat for a year and set up a wonderful establishment there, but now he has gone there is already a feeling of wild chaos about it and no doubt the eggs are all finding their way into the black market.

I was supposed to be going to the local high school to give an English lesson to-morrow but Daddy wants to go to Jorhat instead and celebrate Fiona's birthday in a shopping spree – i.e. get a record if we can find one.

Don't know why Granny is so against her [Fiona's] French venture, she seems to forget that at her age I was doing vast journeys across India with you and dogs and cats and on my own – the only thing I worry about is the driving capacity of the people from whom she takes lifts. Yes of course we shall let you have the money for a scooter in May, wish it could be a car but I suppose they are hard to come by at a price we can any of us afford.

It is warm here now, April really is the cruellest month but we are six inches ahead of last year on rainfall and the tea is roaring ahead – maddeningly this is the one year Daddy doesn't want it to as his factory is being rebuilt and isn't going to be ready for another month.

*It is very beautiful and lush, particularly in the milky early mornings when the leaves are soaked in a blue dew, I quote Laurie Lee to myself as I take the dogs for a walk and chew the bitter buds of the new growth.*

*With much love from us both – Mummy  
P.S. Leave Bernier till I come, not worth sending.*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, April 17th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter from your Essex doss house, I see the keeper of the archives there has written a book on the subject so is probably one of the best people in the country to help you.<sup>359</sup> Great fun, I should love to poke among graveyards and church records. Re. transport, we think a new, or fairly new scooter would be the best buy, then I can take it off you when we come home or one of the girls. If we sent £30 next month you could put that down as a first instalment and we could get the bank to pay off the rest monthly. We were very relieved to get a letter from Fiona too, she seems to have romped round Europe on 3/6 sleeping in telephone kiosks and the basements of churches, I wish she had told me she needed more money but still it was very enterprising though I'm glad I didn't know what was going on at the time!*

*We have had a world traveller staying with us, he strode onto the verandah announcing himself as an archaeologist from Australia who was studying the river systems of India – we couldn't quite make him out as he was very knowledgeable on all sorts of subjects, absolutely stony broke, and quite uninterested in our ruins though madly keen to see the tea and the factory. We decided he was probably a Chinese spy but took him in anyway, I've never known anyone talk so much, we took it in turns to listen while the other one went and lay down with a damp cloth on their forehead.*

*He had everything he possessed in a kit bag, but advised against this as being terribly difficult to carry, the first afternoon I took him to tea with my headmaster and we watched a Bihu dance party, wonderful drumming and a fascinating horn player, the horn being made from a buffalo horn, but the dancing consists of rather vague shuffling. Interesting as being a survival of the very earliest pre Hindu culture, and the songs they sing as the dance equally ancient though they had added one or two about the Chinese invasion! I simply must manage to get a tape recorder to bring back so that I can go round collecting samples of all these songs and ballads.*

*We sent our spy onto the Bishop at Dibrugarh, he only had Rs50 between him and Calcutta and then said he was going on to a dig in Thailand, he was an Englishman who had emigrated to Australia to get rich quick and had twice lost everything in smashes and finally his wife in a car crash, it all might have been true, and it made a change.*

*I'm having a week off from my teaching and intended to spend it trying to work out some way of brightening up Richard Steele but so far have done nothing. It is difficult to know where one would start with an improving campaign here, either at the bottom or the top I should imagine. My dream would be to open a really good, well-equipped school with well-trained English teachers, people like you who would be prepared to live cheap and meet lots of frustration, but the first thing would be to find someone to finance it. I don't even know if that would work, as the Catholics have such schools and though everyone thinks they're wonderful nobody seems keen on copying them. I do feel education is the answer but proper education not the half-baked substitute that money is being wasted on now, and something must be waiting for the bright ones at the end.*

*One would need plenty of that "nerve of failure"<sup>360</sup> here, according to the Hindu conception "nerve" doesn't really come into it – total indifference to success or failure, a*

*stage of being suspended above ones actions, is the thing to aim at. Indifference isn't the right word either as it implies lack of interest, the two words most often used are renunciation and release, the one leading to the other with absolute inevitability, renunciation of course not being a negative "giving up" but a positive fight against self-interest. You know all this from the Perennial Philosophy of course, all religions say the same but we conveniently ignore them. Pain and the suffering of others is the hard thing to fit in, as Menander<sup>361</sup> says "Poor mortal never pray to have not griefs, Pray to have fortitude" and that's about the best one can do.*

*I am making an effort to get up to a big literary conference at Digboi on Sunday, Dr Humayun Kabir the recent Minister of Culture (or some such) is to be there, don't know if I shall meet him but he would be a good person to contact about books and manuscripts. Can't get a word out of the National Library.*

*We had the Higham family to dinner on Wednesday, Paul is starting at Bromsgrove in the autumn, a nice boy so hope he can get through his common entrance.*

*It's still wet and incredibly cool, I've never known weather like this in April and the mushrooms are still springing up everywhere.*

*With much love from us both – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo April 26th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is a couple of days late. I suddenly realised that the Highams were off and I hadn't done my folk-stories for them to take home so spent Saturday on that. Your friend's mother in Harrods might come as a help in boosting the book if it ever gets into print, what a nice job, just the sort of thing I'd like to do if I didn't live a million miles away.*

*I can understand your feelings about your witches, perhaps you could get a teaching or other job for a couple of years and then go back to study some more on the proceeds? It's not the age that matters, a lot of people are in their late twenties before they know what they want to do, it's the finance really. I feel the same about my little researching, avenues are forever waiting to be explored and stones to be turned over and I'm sure the National Archives in Delhi are piled high with fascinating manuscripts, the only thing is they would probably be in Persian. I have at last had four more books from the library, huge thick volumes which I'm supposed to have back in a fortnight but obviously won't.*

*Its heating up and one's energy consequently flagging, but at least I have only eight weeks of it. We spent the day with the Merediths yesterday, they had a Calcutta Director and his wife staying, rather a dim couple though handsome – I mentioned that Calcutta's poverty was so distressing I didn't know how anyone could live with it and she said that when she started noticing that sort of thing she realised it was time for her to go on leave. That sort of thing knocks the breath out of me. Daddy played golf and swam and was feeling better for it all, I just sat and made conversation from 9 till 5 and was somewhat exhausted.*

*I always feel a bit depressed when I visit Daphne, she has everything, a wonderful bungalow, excellent cook, hundreds of gardeners, swimming pool etc. and I think the depression comes from the feeling she gives me that these things matter – when I know quite well they don't and she is no happier for them. Obviously I haven't got very far along the eight-fold path or I wouldn't let them worry me at all.*

*Last Tuesday Brenda and I went to tea in Sibsagar with an Assamese girl who had written to me when she read a letter of mine in the paper – she is very clever, was first in all Assam in her M.A. and as a result small, bespectacled and pockmarked but rather sweet with a nice and most intelligent family. The father and brother were mad about fish farming and they and Brenda spent the afternoon talking about algae and induced breeding, they take out the*

*pituitary glands from dead fish and inject a solution of this into live ones and then put them into large cloth bags where they lay millions of eggs. They have the theory of it pat, but can't get the labour to do the actual donkey work as Pakistanis are all being thrown out and Assamese are too lazy. One more brick wall.*

*We ate rice pudding and coconut cakes and I listened to the sad life story of the sister whose husband went to England five years ago to take a course and has disappeared, I found myself taking his last address and promising to spend my leave looking for him, which news Daddy greeted with loud cheers as you can imagine!*

*Brenda had them all to tea yesterday, the brother with his guitar and they were going to sing folk songs, I wish I'd been there instead of talking to the dull rich Directors, I find myself these days far more interested in my schoolboys and my history books than in what goes on in the social life of Nazira P.O. and feel I shall soon be exhibiting signs of schizophrenia.*

*The social life last week consisted of a party at the Highams for the children, it went on an awful long time and wasn't too bad except it was all twisting and shaking which I can't do. Paul Higham at thirteen is a wonderful dancer and not at all inhibited, he is going to Bromsgrove next term if he passes his C.E., maybe I can say a word in someone's ear as he is a nice, well-mannered boy and I'm sure just the "type" they want.*

*Anne amazes me by saying she is revelling in D.H. Lawrence and thinks of trying her hand at writing, what a transformation, it used to take whips and carrots to make her write me a short essay when she was out here and reading was the most boring thing she could think of, she certainly writes most amusing letters, far better than Fiona's which are obviously scribbled in the bus or a coffee bar. However I suppose I'm lucky to get any at all judging by what some mothers tell me.*

*Will send £30 for an instalment on scooter.  
Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, May 8th 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*I don't think I've had a letter this week, but I've rather lost track. I sit every evening waiting for a letter from one of you and after about three days I start moaning that I never hear and Daddy points out that I've already heard that week. The last one told of your motor bike purchase,<sup>362</sup> hope it has turned out a success, it doesn't matter about a scooter, I don't suppose I should ever learn to ride one anyway. It sounds so lovely at home now, I wish I could be there, its lovely here too and I've just been watching a golden oriole chasing a mynah away from what I imagine must be its nest.*

*To-day is the first bright one we've had for nearly a week, I was up at 6 and walking the dogs round the garden, the hills brilliant blue and the shade trees aglow with parrots, they eat all the young buds so Daddy doesn't see the beauty of them at all.*

*The only thing casting a slight blight over things is the fact that I've got to make two speeches to-morrow, first here and then I've got to hurtle to Nazira in time to make another. Brenda is also going to speak on her impressions of Assam, she is racking her brains for something to say that isn't too damning.*

*Poor Brenda, she is very fed up and frustrated, she has met all the usual brick walls and being young she wants to do everything now, straight away, and every day that passes without achieving something irritates her more. A pity because she is the sort of person who could do quite a lot with a bit of patience and her husband is quite happy and interested, but I don't know how much longer she will stick it. It is the Nazira set up that is so frustrating too, we really think Simpson is going round the bend, he sits locked up in his office all day*

*and never visits gardens which is his main job, and then he gives birth to the most peculiar letters as the result of the hours and hours he spends behind his desk.*

*I'm getting very attached to my class at school, one of the most jungli ones pressed a book of poetry into my hands yesterday, I was terribly touched, he is an oaf at English but writes dear little poems about flower-buds and his dreams, so unexpected. Their English doesn't seem to be improving much, but we are getting to know each other and I feel quite happy and relaxed with them. I asked them to write an essay on how they spent their Sundays and got back pages on how they look after their cattels and go to bazar for selling something and for purchasing cloths and then they wash their foot and body and so Sunday is a beootiful day and the next day is Monday! How they manage to write essays at all in their mud huts with all their family on top of them and no electric light I can't imagine, we have been reading a Buddhist legend and I find they know nothing about Buddhism, in fact they know nothing about anything but are absolutely entranced to hear whatever I like to tell them. I have dreams about making them a really nice recreation room but know it will never come off, same old subject, where to start. I must say that on the whole they are very happy, healthy and well-mannered and there is none of the kicking against authority you get at home so perhaps nothing else matters.*

*Had a letter from my agent saying he had got the folk tales so it now remains to see whether the publisher wants them. I'm sure "Country Fair" would take anything you liked to send on the subject of looking up old records and so on, they wouldn't pay much but it would be a start.*

*We went to Jorhat on Wed. for our monthly shopping day, bought two records, a piano one played by Dinu Lipatti<sup>363</sup> who I've never heard of but he died soon after making the record, and another Mozart, the "Jupiter" and "Haffner".*

*I was wondering whether to bring the records home for you to tape, or are they too corny? What happened to the gramophone by the way, Anne is always saying she wants one. Was wondering if you could book us some seats for a Stratford play on August 9th, thought we might come down to John Lampitts wedding and then have a day at Stratford (could distribute ourselves round on various reluctant friends for the night or your room) he is being married there on Aug. 8th. If you could let me know what it costs. Am plodding on with my Moghuls, get into quagmires sometimes and all the interest goes out of the subject but this is quite common I know, T. H. White describes the feeling very well.*

*Tony Connell has two eagles, a fishing and a crested which he is trying to train, they eat pounds of meat a day and terrify the servants but otherwise show no signs of progress. He spent last week end with us, an awfully nice boy but frustrated like the rest of us, partly by the country and partly by the company. Daddy is on a slimming course of dry biscuits for lunch and tennis against the factory wall at tea, he is losing a bit not as fast as he'd like.*

*I haven't done any reading this week except Assamese and "The Golden Bough"<sup>364</sup>, my speech is to be "Folklore of the East and West" can't remember any from the west thats the trouble.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, May 15th 1964*

*My dear Alan,*

*Two letters this week, I'm so glad your D. Phil. thing has been cleared up,<sup>365</sup> a feather in your cap that the great Trevor-Roper is on your side (he was never on Roberts!). Do hope you will get a bigger grant too as I feel things are pretty tight at the moment, specially with that enormous rent to be paid. I'm sorry about the bike, and hope you won't be stung for a whole lot more, you should have got some expert advice before buying it really.*

*Pouring rain at the moment which is heaven after a couple of very humid days, I was up walking the dogs at 6.30 a.m. this morning and it was steaming hot without a cloud in the sky, but suddenly great black ridges rode up over the hills and here it is, bliss.*

*I was approached to take another class at school and started yesterday, there are 46 in this class and after two hours of standing and struggling with a foreign language and the heat and all I felt quite ill for the rest of the day so I don't know if I shall be able to do it. It seems a bit feeble, perhaps I shall get used to it. My new class ranges from 13 to 16 years and are much brighter, or maybe it's just that the novelty is wearing off for the old lot, I'm trying to work in a bit of grammar and find they know hardly any, the teachers of the middle standards are "regularly irregular" as one of the masters explained, in other words turn up when they feel like it so the poor children get no continuity.*

*On Saturday we went to a cultural show in Nazira, it was held in a small, hot school filled to the rafters with people and mosquitoes but started quite well with spring songs and dances. Then a gent from Gauhati sang as well as he was able with clouds of beetles and flying ants entering his mouth every time he took a deep breath, and then eight ancient Muslim priests sat in front of the microphone and moaned for about two hours, they only got rid of them by switching the lights on and off violently. Brenda and I got the giggles, thinking of how Peter Sellers would take them off, half of them nodded off so the rest kept saying "Hoy" all together very loudly at intervals and it was the hoys that really got us down. We had to leave after that and miss what we were assured was a stirring drama called "Death for country"!*

*On Sunday there was a meeting here with dance competitions and a prize giving and speech making ceremony after it. Of course it was running hours late and I never got to Nazira to deliver my stirring words on folklore, the hours I spent with the golden bough too. The dances were the spring dances of Assam, there are two drummers and the rest of them have split bamboos which they clack together and the odd flute, the winning team were really good, all dressed in hand woven gold silk shirts and dhotis with white scarves round their heads, their drummers were superb, I always visualise what a fortune one could make on the Telly with these people who are so much more handsome, graceful and rhythmic than anyone at home and yet I would hate to do it, it would ruin them.*

*We sat from 11 a.m. until 5 p.m. under a tin roof without any lunch on a very hot day, but for most of the time were entranced. By the time my speech was due half the audience had drifted away which was just as well, I described our May Day festival and gave them to understand that the whole of England goes prancing off to the woods to bring home flowers and dance round the maypole afterwards! Brenda delivered her first speech in Nazira on her impressions of Assam, when it was translated into Assamese there were roars of laughter all the way through, but she still doesn't know what about.*

*Am coming to the end of my latest Moghuls, pretty stiff going this lot, from 1761 to 1788 when the last real emperor was blinded, and a mass of intrigues and battles which nobody could make interesting. Do you have to "book" reading in the Bodleian and will I even be allowed in? I want to study the diaries of the emperors particularly, and any other original journals of the period, perhaps you could pull some strings for me? I wrote to Robert congratulating him on his successes, his new venture on the history of the British empire will involve a lot of Indian research I should imagine, quite a vast task in fact. I expect it is jealousy but though Robert writes entertainingly I wouldn't have called his books "literature" would you?*

*Don't seem to find much time for light reading these days, as I struggle with Assamese short stories in the intervals of everything else, they are touching and rather childish but give one an insight into the way of life of the people, the last one I read was of a boy who gets his first job after months of searching – on Cherideo T.E. in the Assam Co! I was dying to read*

*about the wicked manager but he turned out to be someone called Chaudhuri so I suppose the author had taken the name from a book. It's depressing to find how many words I still don't know, I'm too old and forget so quickly.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Cherideo May 27th 1964

*My dear Alan*

*I'm afraid this is a few days late, there seem to have been a mass of postal holidays this last week and every time I send for a form I find the P.O. for which Nazira is famous is shut! I got yours yesterday and was relieved to hear the bike was back and hadn't been too expensive to mend. Are you all right for money for June?*

*I gather you aren't going to Borstal in July after all so perhaps there won't be room for me in your rooms then? I don't want to arrive and disorganise you, but can't afford to go to a hotel either, it might just happen that a friend has an empty room for week or two. I haven't quite grasped who Peter is, a college friend? It sounds so blissful at home now, here we are having a heat wave which we always do before the monsoon arrives but is trying nevertheless, one is pouring with sweat by 8 a.m. and everything becomes such an effort. I'm very lucky to have my Air Conditioner of course.*

*I have finished my books so am trying to go through all my notes and make some sort of date chart, dates have always been my weakness. If my article isn't out by the time I get home I shall drop them a line I think, what is your thesis for Trevor-Roper on specifically and are going to read it or what? I read somewhere that more and more people are staying on to do post graduate research, I shouldn't fret too much about youth flying past, it is a pretty elastic quality which can't be tied down to years, some people never have it at all and others keep its essential wonder and surprise all their lives. Most of the young men out here are so old they have lost the use of all their senses and are to all intents and purposes dead already.*

*I haven't done teaching this week what with holidays and the driver being ill but am going back to-day, the temperature in the schoolroom is over 100 and it is a frightful effort trying to keep the class awake but the odd moment when you get and hold their attention is so satisfying that it makes up for all the rest. Teaching in India is so different, there is no participation by the children at all, they are just supposed to listen and not ask questions and it is taking them a long time to get over the feeling that their job is to sit still and say nothing. Brenda and I have such dreams of our model school, maybe she will have time to do something about it but I don't think they are going to stay.*

*We had rather a dull weekend, the Merediths were staying and we took them to the film at Sonari on Sat. evening which was a very queer Scott Fitzgerald story called "Tender is the Night" but actually we quite enjoyed it, and on Sunday there was a golf do in Nazira which was very hot and boring for us non golfers.*

*It was the full moon of Buddhas' enlightenment last night, I sat outside under it for a long time trying to get enlightened but what with the mosquitos and damp grass didn't make much progress. It was a wonderful night though, almost as bright as day and it was excitement to feel that a tiger might walk out across the lawn.*

*It doesn't look as if the Rev. Michael Scott<sup>366</sup> is making much progress with the Nagas, we misjudged him I think as he really is trying hard and is driving about unarmed in a white jeep in the most hostile country with guns trained on him from every hill, but the Nagas are in a very strong position with both China and Pakistan egging them on and the knowledge that they are practically unconquerable in their mountain jungles.*



*The refugee problem here is pitiful, they are pouring in in thousands from Pakistan every day and one sees such pathetic pictures in every paper, I so wish the U.N. would send some really efficient teams to manage the thing.*

*I do wish I could see you being yokelish and playing your lute or is it lyre, has the white witch proved interesting? Did you read the long thing in the Sunday Times about the "W.H" of Shakespeare's sonnets? I must say I wasn't convinced, but it was amusing. I don't seem to be doing much reading these days except Assamese short stories which take a long time and are very quaint and old fashioned, full of death bed scenes of saintly girls etc.*

*My boys at school are always asking me to lend them books and plays to read, I must try and get a stock of paper backs at home for them, the masters are also crazy for books poor dears, "to kill time" they tell me in a melancholy way but I think more to escape from the worries of providing for the fifteen or so relations most of them are supporting.*

*It is nearly time to go now, sorry this is so boring but life is very routine these days, only three more letters I think, I really can't believe it.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

19th May 1964 Board to the General Manager, Nazira

Dear Sir,

R.G.G. Higham

The Board have carefully considered you letter No. P.19/64 dated May 12th. Although they have a higher opinion of Mr. Higham than you have expressed, what you have written does no more than confirm the views contained in your previous reports.

They hope that Mr. Higham's low standard will be corrected as a result of your visit. Could his low place in the sale price list be connected with the experiments he carried out with troughs and rotorvanes?

However in deference to your views they consider that Mr. Macfarlane should act for you in respect of the home gardens until he goes on leave and draw the allowance of Rs. 250 p.m. We presume Mr. Macfarlane has made his arrangements and would not be willing to postpone his departure to cover at least part of the gap and if which should be so the following should apply.

Thereafter and until your return which appears likely to be about 6 weeks, the Board would like to show their confidence in the Garden Managers concerned and leave them to carry on without supervision with the suggestion that if the Manager of Bamon and the Acting Manager of Cherideo wish for advice or assistance, they should go to Mr. Higham, while the Manager of Mackeypore, Ligri and Lakmijam go to Mr. Yates.

As no supervision is involved in the latter arrangement, no additional allowance will be payable.

5th June 1964 Letter from the General Manager to London Board.

Deputy General Manager.

I attach hereto the draft of a letter that I have prepared in connection with the appointment of Deputy G.M. This letter will be issued in the first instance to (a) Mr. D.D. Mowatt, as the permanent Deputy G.M. of the Moran Group. (b) Mr. W.J.C. Charlier who will act as Deputy G.M. during Mr. Mowatt's forthcoming absence on leave and (c) Mr. D.K. Macfarlane who will be temporarily appointed as Deputy G.M. of the 7 home gardens from the date I proceed on leave, until he himself proceeds on leave at the end of July.

I also enclose the copy of an accompanying letter which will be sent to Mr. Macfarlane.

I feel that it is best to have this position fully clarified as at present I am not sure that I am interpreting the Board's wishes correctly. I have of course not [now?] received the Board's letter PGM. 26/64 and in this connection Mr. Macfarlane writes to me as follows:

"I thank you for your letter No. GM/23/64 dated 3rd June 1964, and note what the Board says.

I confirm that I wish to stick to my present arrangements for going on home leave.

I note that the duties of this appointment will be notified to me later, and I request that these be made quite clear. The Board in making the appointment must assume that as Deputy General Manager I am consulted on all relevant matters."

In view of the last paragraph of Mr. Macfarlane's letter it is most important that the duties of the Deputy G.M. are correctly stated.

I presume that the Board would like Mr. Macfarlane to sign the Board letters during the period he will be acting as Deputy G.M. of the Nazira gardens, but perhaps they will kindly confirm and also advise who should sign after Mr. Macfarlane proceeds on leave...

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, June 6th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*A nice long letter yesterday which cheered me after rather a sad afternoon delivering one of my kittens to its new home, I gave it to my Assamese friend Anima and though she and her family are very educated and nice they have rather odd ideas about animals. I went to tea there, and we had a good long moan about Nehru, although he has done precious little for Assam it is extraordinary what a feeling of emptiness and misery there is everywhere, we shall see if the extraordinary hold he had on everyones emotions was altogether healthy, I'm inclined to think not, much as I admired him. It was very true that he was like the sacred peepul tree, a source of great comfort and protection, but underneath which nothing will grow. His funeral was terribly moving, I think I told you though, now I'm re-reading his autobiography which brings him alive as he was in his wonderful youth, not the poor tottering old man one remembers recently. It is poignant to read of his bright hopes and dreams and then look around, but Assam is not really a good example of modern India, nor is Calcutta which are the only two places I've seen for ages.*

*I've had an Assamese week, in fact my whole life is rather turning away from the Sahib Log and becoming involved with the Sons of the Soil as they insist on calling them in the papers.*

*My schoolboys are starting their exams next week and then break up so I shant see them again till October, I can't really see any improvement in the English since I started but I think there is a slight change in the teaching methods, I notice all the masters are now marking homework which is an improvement, the headmaster made them write an Essay called "My school" last week and added in his own handwriting to each "The name of our headmaster is Barkakati B.A. He is a very amiable fellow"! I am having Class 10 to tea tomorrow, all thirty of them, I hope it doesn't rain and they aren't prowling round the bungalow. The weather has broken and is cooler, but still humid.*

*I have got the "Memoirs of William Hickey" from Calcutta which is priceless, I expect you have read it. I have given up any idea of time with my Moghuls, shall probably still be tapping away on my typewriter about them in twenty years, with you working on your witches in the other corner! Anthropological theories of witchcraft sound fascinating and this would be just the place for it, ever since the beginning of time Assam has been known as the land of magic and witchcraft, and this links up with their sakti Hinduism, which in turn takes one back to the mother goddess, sakti being the female principle.*

*My historian friend came to see me yesterday with a list of books he wants me to get at home, he is doing a D.Phil. too on the Cultural History of Assam, he says that a Buddhist priest from Thailand has been brought over and started a little college to teach people the old Ahom script which sounds fascinating, the Ahoms were Thais.*

*I will certainly keep an eye open for animals, the folk stories are full of them but mostly odd creatures called "tail snatchers" or "toe nibblers" nothing very romantic. There is one theme running through all the stories of girls who for various reasons have to marry an animal, who of course is a prince in disguise – like the frog prince, I wonder what this Signifies?*

*I can't believe this will be almost my last letter, so much seems to have happened since I left England like running away from the Chinese, it seems centuries since I saw you all. Anne has decided against Domestic drudgery which I think is a good thing, it sounded vastly boring and having to work in that hideous toast rack building in Manchester would be agony too. We'll have to find something else for her.*

*As you are going to be away from July 11th I will carry on with my plan to come down then, if it's too much of a squash after you get back I can spend a week visiting all the friends and relations round about and we can all go back north together, probably need two shifts to get your books back. I'm spending a couple of nights in Manchester with all fifteen of Fiona's friends who are obligingly turning out of their beds for me, knowing how cold and tired I always feel when I first arrive it may prove a trying ordeal all round!*

*I have to go to the meeting of a local college in about an hour, which has made me a member of its governing board, chiefly I think for what it hopes to get out of Daddy in the way of tin roofing and bamboos, it is rather disconcerting to go gushingly along with lots of high ideas about Education and then find that what they want is two new latrines.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

16 June 1964: from Assam Company Records

Home Leave. Mr. J. R. Simpson. Mr. Simpson left Assam at the commencement of his leave on 14th June, 1964

Deputy G.M. Mr. D. K. Macfarlane assumed the duties of Deputy G.M. of the Nazira Group of Gardens on the 14th June, 1964.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 16th June 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Really and truly my last letter, I leave a week to-day, the monsoon is late in breaking this year, it would be, and will probably follow me and my planes all over India. Its damp and quite cool here, Daddy has a heavy cold which he will probably give me just before I leave too so I expect to arrive a wreck but some English air will soon put me right.*

*Thank you for a letter I got on Saturday, I'm afraid I haven't quite grasped what this new job you hope to get is but you can explain it all to me. Brenda got your long letter and she and John were most impressed at your clear logical mind! They have been having great fun trying to find the answers to some of your questions, especially the one about the average amount spent on food etc. by the average working man. It is almost impossible to get a straight answer to any question here, they say the thing they think you want to know and you are supposed to be able to decide for yourself whether it is the truth or not and make the necessary adjustments, a curious trait that was irritating Sir T. Roe in 1611 and still drives us mad.*

*I don't know what has happened about my article but shall write to them when I get back. I am busy trying to finish the four Vols of William Hickey, it's great fun but horrifying too, the nepotism, graft, and coldblooded unfeelingness of the White Man in Bengal from Warren Hastings down chills one's own blood even now. They all spent their time screwing huge sums out of the "opulent natives" and occasionally noticing the corpses on the roadsides when the local famines became very severe. One of the clergymen, in business with the undertaker, looked forward to the "harvest" period of November and December and gave minute instructions as to how much to screw out of the bereaved, the greater their sorrow the more they could be expected to spend. And so on ad nauseam. I suppose the England of George III wasn't too different, but it seems worse when set against the suffering poor of India.*

*I am reading "Ronald Knox" by Waugh, I like it but somehow the problems and lives of he and his friends seem rather "precious" and uninvolved, endlessly debating whether bread was bread or Bread and the Holy Ghost was a second form of breathing and all those elegant cosy teas and the huge sum of money he left at the end of it – imprisoned again by his times I suppose and his Eton–Balliol upbringing but he gives the impression that the only important thing in life is being a Catholic and once you are safely "in" the rest of the world can struggle along somehow.*

*I haven't been teaching this week as they are doing exams, we spent the week end with the Rosses which was rather boring as everyone played golf all the time and on Sunday there was one of the "boozy sessions" at the club that I'm getting to hate more and more, it drives me mad to see that money being poured down people's throats for one thing but of course I can't say anything.*

*Simpson left on Sunday to everyone's vast relief, Daddy is acting for him for six weeks but it doesn't mean much. Much speculation as to whether he will return.*

*I had hoped to go up to Jorhat this week with Brenda to see the man who is starting this new school, they are looking for a principal I believe, a pity you aren't ready, but I don't know much about it or whether it is really as "model" as he intends – I shall be interested in all those visual aids though I think you can have too much of that sort of thing and it isn't a substitute for good teaching.*

*Anne had just got herself a job and was feeling happier, I think she'll be in London when I'm in Oxford, I don't know about Fiona. The Lobbans have been in a flap about their children in Aberdeen but they have been let "out" and are arriving on Friday.*

*I don't seem to have done any packing but it's just a question of flinging a few rags in to a case, I spend several hours in Amsterdam but will probably be too frozen to move out of the airport as I haven't got a warm coat. I'm due at Manchester at 5 p.m. on Sunday and will try and ring you up that evening if anyone knows your number. Till then keep your fingers crossed for me, the most dangerous part of the journey will probably be the road trip to Gauhati.*

*Longing to see you. Much love, Mummy.*

Board to the General Manager

Home Leave. Mr. Macfarlane left Assam at the commencement of his home leave on the 30th July, 1964. Mr. A. I. Leetham took over the Acting Management of Cherideo Purbut T.E. on the 30th July, 1964.

16th October 1964

The Board have decided that Mr. D.K. Macfarlane, on his return from home leave should resume his duties as Deputy General Manager of Cherideo, Lakmijan, Bamon Pookrie and

Suntok with remuneration as before. Gelakey, Makeypore and Ligrie Pookrie will be dealt with by the General Manager direct. The Board wish both Deputy General Managers to countersign the Fortnightly Reports and add their comments on a separate sheet before forwarding such reports to you.

23rd October, 1964

Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane will be leaving the U.K. on 27th October on their return to Assam from home leave. Mr. Macfarlane will be paid by us here up to the end of October. He will be bringing the two hob cutters which were ordered on your request before you left the U.K.

Iris to Alan, Europe Hotel, Cromwell Road, London. Postmark 28th October

*My dear Alan,*

*Just heading off for the Airport & feeling a bit grim but trying to disassociate myself from it all.*

*Anne spent the night with us here, she seems very cheerful, hasn't fixed flats or jobs yet, but is on the point of doing both. I've told her to head for you if she's in trouble. You might be of mutual benefit to each other actually.*

*I shall think of you wrapped in your grey rug poring over those fascinating maps – only wish I'd read more of your work, where did the summer go? The plan for my Moghul book has fallen into my mind. Will explain it later.*

*Have a good year, it'll be nice if Robert joins you. Our best love, darling. Mummy  
Let us know if you want a loan ever.*

Iris to Alan, Calcutta, 30th October 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Back to the filth & starving dogs, one always hopes by some miracle things will have improved but they get worse. The journey was good. We were held up for an hour at Damascus with electrical trouble but otherwise no crises, we came on a Comet with only 4 stops which is much better.*

*Calcutta is very warm & overcast, my plans to stay here didn't materialise, I was a bit optimistic thinking they would! Apparently I didn't say when I was coming & the man I wrote to didn't find out from our agents so nothing was booked.*

*I went to the National Library this morning to find it closed because a minister has died – around to that bookshop advised by Blackwell to be told the manager was away & nobody else had any idea where anything was – the frustrations of trying to get anything done here are almost too much until one unwinds & adjusts oneself!*

*The bookshop actually turned out to be a hovel down a filthy lane miles from anywhere, I crossed a grimy courtyard & climbed some dark stone steps with a strong feeling that the taxi driver was a white slave trader, but finally reached a tiny room with books piled up to the ceiling, all over the floor, all over a little desperate man prodding at a typewriter – probably wonderful bargains amongst them but one would have needed a day to sort them out. So my Moghuls look like receding into the background again, unless I can make a book with what I've got.*

*A shop in the hotel has an original Moghul miniature they're selling for Rs 1800 – pretty sure its genuine, wonder if the V & A would be interested.*

*Feel disorientated & rather depressed at the moment but I expect will settle & find plenty to do, the problems always seem so gigantic when one first comes back & insoluble.*

*I felt happier about Anne after seeing her, she didn't seem too flustered by London, & will be happy for a bit I think. Keep thinking of you all in your little rooms, when I get back here it seems as if I've never been away. We fly up to-morrow morning, shall be glad to take my conscience away from this ghastly spot, though sorry not to have explored it a bit.*

*Much love, Mummy*

3rd November 1964

Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane. Returned from leave on 30th October and Mr Macfarlane took over charge of Cherideo Purbut T.E. on the following day.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 3rd November 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*This time last week we were driving down to Oxford, it seems at least five years ago. I expect you've heard by now of our grisly journey, at least the last stages. As far as Calcutta the flight was absolutely smooth but all the way I was haunted by the fact that the wheels were going to stick so that when it actually happened wasn't at all surprised, merely petrified! Trust me to be sitting next the window right on top of where the wheel was supposed to appear, Daddy and the others had no idea that anything was wrong, and I was too rigid to turn round and tell them. My companion kept saying helpfully "My God now we are really in trouble" and when we got down we found Gauhati airport all ready with fire engines, but that was all they had got ready, nothing at all was arranged as to how we should finish our journey.*

*After about an hour of climbing in and out of buses and standing about on the boiling tarmac we were taken in to Gauhati and plonked in the Guest House for the night, and Daddy spent a good deal of it trying to get in touch with Nazira and arrange taxis – unsuccessfully needless to say. We were very glad to see Ian Leetham at six next morning (Liz and the children were on the same plane) and the four of them, us two, Primrose Corps and the driver and all our luggage all piled into one car. What with breaking of petrol pipes and punctures it took us exactly twelve hours to reach Nazira, a good and somewhat typical reintroduction to the joys of life Out East.*

*I'm afraid I haven't found any of it very joyful so far, I picked up some tummy trouble on the way, and returned to find my lovely compound under a foot of grass, I've never seen anything like it. Some of the shrubs have disappeared completely, some are dead and the whole place will take months to recover. It's a funny thing, on the plane I thought "If I get out of this I'll never complain about anything again" but I've been doing nothing else since. The two big dogs terribly thin and covered with sores and fleas so I doubt one way and another I shall get my history of the Moguls written. Anyway there is no question of being bored, it'll take the whole of eighteen months to get this lot sorted out...*

*Actually thinking of you in that nice cosy room with the logs switched on in the grate is my one comfort at present, I still worry a little about Fiona. We found our way to London Airport quite easily but were terribly confused when we got there, millions of lights and tunnels and Daddy rapidly coming to the boil. The man was waiting to collect the car and we found the girl we were escorting out, we flew by Geneva, Istanbul, Beirut, Bagdad and Karachi and arrived two and a half hours late at Calcutta so that we didn't get into bed till two in the morning and slept till 11.30 next day.*

*Calcutta was very cool we met Liz Leetham at Dum Dum next morning, poor thing she had just got off the London plane and had lost a suitcase with all her jewels, new shoes, handbags etc. in it. John Lampett has resigned and everyone here is sunk in gloom, ah well, I think of that croft in Barra & feel more peaceful. I really will get down to my history and my*

*painting & teaching as soon as I have sorted myself out. Don't work too hard (are you listening?) & get those calories down yourself won't you. Will write more cheerfully next time I hope.*

*Much love - Mummy*

Notebook: November 6th 1964

Sitting on my verandah, 6.30 a.m. in a world of birds – hornbills in the palms, bulbuls swinging in the Chinese hat, squirrels, mynahs shouting in the rubber trees, doves far away, crows in the beech. The mist below the Naga hills is turning from pink to smoky grey as the sun rises – now it is up, the hills turning dark purple against its brilliance.

Slowly the beauty & quiet are drawing me back into their spell – at first it all seemed empty, achingly empty of most of the things that matter. The bungalow was huge & stony and bare, the compound stubbly and colourless compared with the autumn pageant I had left. The rice fields as we drove from the airport were beautiful in spite of everything & the long lazy grace of the people came over straight away. Now the ferns are gold washed, a molten gold is dropping from the roof onto the tiles and gold mist is sailing away.

A week has drifted past in which I have gardened & filed & arranged my glasses but done nothing really, in the grip of the aimlessness that always attacks me, perhaps also tired after our worrying summer. Such a beautiful summer & in a sense the strains it brought have brought us closer together.

I remember Oxford, the heat of my little room in the evening as I knitted with gauze round my neck & my head full of Moghuls.

A mynah is now shouting & bobbing on the phallic symbol, it is striking seven, the sun has hit the verandah, the sweepers brush whispers across the stone collecting little piles of moths & leaves, a magpie robin is the first at the bird bath.

My schoolmaster came to see me with a letter written by himself: 'The bearer of this is an excellent master, with charming manners & an amiable disposition, willing & perseverant'.

Now the sun is fully up & shadows on the brilliant lawn, it is nice to think of an empty day ahead with nothing to do but watch the birds and plan the books I'm going to write – if only I could hear from Anne I would be really happy.

The egrets are pacing solemnly like choir boys, the hills are grey felt, flat & colourless, the bird song is muted. The day is set, and I must go & dress. Bother this biro, everything is just the same as far as inefficiency & non-availability goes.

Went to a bookshop in Calcutta, the taxi-driver was arrested, the shop turned out to be a pitch black little room in a filthy back lane across a courtyard full of skinny children in open drains, and though there were plenty of books the Manager was of course out!

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 10th November 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Your letter written before we left is the only communication that has braved the barriers of Nazira P.O. – it was very welcome of course. I know Anne has written, she bought an Airgraph at London Airport which she was going to send off next day but it has never arrived and of course I'm worrying like mad about her though unnecessarily I'm sure, she can always come and use your sleeping bag if she is desperate and homeless. Sorry to hear about your cold, you must increase the pills and try and get out into any sun there is.*

*I have settled down fairly happily now, the weather is perfect which helps and the pleasure of birds and animals is constant and consoling. There is an absolute pageant of birds all day*



long, it makes one realise how scarce they are in England now and how shy, here they come and dangle on the shrubs a few inches away.

I have been working in the morning and half the afternoon, making notes on my Burma books which are full of interesting information about the Shans who were Ahoms (or rather vice versa). "The Tribes of Highland Burma"<sup>367</sup> is fascinating too although the anthropological language beyond me in places and I haven't quite grasped his dynamic new theory, I'll return it when I have shown it to my historian friend who I fear will be even more in the dark but it may give him an idea how to tackle the study of a tribe. Please don't dream of sending me anything for Christmas, the books you gave me have been more than enough, I'm going to take them and show them to everyone in Shillong who might be interested, connected with the north east frontier tract – with doubtful results I fear.

I have had little deputations from my school, including the headmaster who is looking for a job in Jorhat and brought us a paper to sign which he had written himself, "This is to certify that Sri Barkakati is a man of charming manners and amiable disposition, a first rate headmaster and keen, capable and perseverant"!

I went to the school on Saturday and found things the same, the only decent building locked because it is the Craft Room and there are no crafts or master to teach them, everyone huddles into the other ramshackle classrooms. I'm going to try that "Essential English" on the junior classes who are just starting as I think it might set them off on the right route, the model school at Jorhat is apparently coming on well and they have got a headmistress from England arriving soon so that is encouraging.

The Naga situation is much better too and real hopes of a settlement soon, we think of it from the point of view of the river but there will be lots of jobs going in all the new schools they are starting there, where anthropology could be a wildly interesting side line and witches superabundant.

We went up the river on Sunday, took our breakfast and ate it looking out over the green water with only the clatter of bamboos and the drift of a fishing eagles to disturb the peace, afterwards we swam in the warm water of the first rapid and then floated downstream back to the place where the boats are kept, Daddy rather unsuccessfully holding our clothes over his head, they were sodden by the time they arrived but it didn't matter as it was so warm; I do hope we shall be able to spend most Sundays there and not get bogged down in boring lunch parties as we usually do.

So far I haven't been near the club, Daddy went yesterday and said it was appalling. I have been put in charge of decorations for the "Spree" but only intend to put up some paper chains, I think it shocking that money should be poured into these sahibs shenanigans when India is starving.

Brenda and I are taking a picnic lunch to Sibsagar to-day as she is starting teaching again after a small operation – she is looking very thin and is still somewhat frustrated by the lack of progress she has made but I think she underestimates, the very fact that she is taking the trouble at all is important and her methods of teaching must be making an impression.

She is the only Mem I have seen, still feel quite disconnected from the "life" of the community, think of nothing but Moghuls and you all at home and my garden which I have been digging in fairly hard in the evenings, my books from the Hakluyt Society haven't yet arrived so I haven't much Moghul to go on but am re-indexing and filing according to your instructions with mountains of little cards piling up as a result. It was kind of you to say you owe everything to us but not true, your own exertions did most of it and still do and we are the grateful ones.

Much love, Mummy

Notebook: Sunday Nov. 14th 1964

Lying on a stomach full of curry with my fingers sticking together & orange juice & the back of my knees roasting & grass prickling my elbows. Birds are cheeping softly, rubber leaves are clacking against others as they twirl to earth, doves are cooing, the tin roof is cracking & a few shreds of cloud are lying on the sky.

A typical Sunday afternoon, the last like this I shall have for a long time though. On Friday I went to tea in the village beyond Lingibur, a slightly drunk old man with yellow whites to his eyes told me 2 folktales. One was a Teton<sup>368</sup> story – a bright young boy whose parents go out, tells a visiting friend they have taken an elephant & a branch of the Holong to catch a tiny fish. They are so angry that they throw him out & he goes to a stall-keeper, does some small job & then eats everything on the stall. The keeper is furious, handcuffs him & they set off for the palace. Meet a mustard oil carrier, pushes him down & takes the oil, more handcuffs meets a cotton seller, puts the cotton in oil, more handcuffs. King asks who the boy with all the handcuffs is, everyone tells him, King says he had better cut bamboos, there are a lak to be cut (he will give him a lak to cut). He demands the lak, then goes round calling out 'Who will give me a dinner for a lak of rupees'. Princess agrees, makes her wash him give him new clothes feed him. Asks the King who does these things. King says his wife. So he marries her. Goes out to work in the rice-field, refuses refreshment saying the King's daughter is bringing some, the prince says 'If the King's daughter brings your food I will give you my land.'

The other was the story of why the cock crows at the sunrise - how the sun went on strike & all the animals were sent, the strong buffalo the wily jackal etc. & finally the chicken, who asked the sun please to light his way back over the Patkoi mountains & when he did crowed for joy & ever afterwards when he heard that self-satisfied crow the sun rose in a fury.

As it got dark lamps were brought in & I was given sweet, warm, smoky milk to drink & rice beer & rice cakes and the women came in & sat in corners, shiny haired & shy. Bumped back in the dark while the driver & another drunk little man told each other how much better things had been under the British.

Now the sun is on my ankles, the spotted doves have jogged plumply about, had their baths & gone, the egrets are in full strength on the lawn, shadows have reached out to the sundial, I am being bitten on the forehead.

Went to see the Bharalis & told them the story of the son-in-law. 'Is the woman sterilised?' asked Mr Bharali. My head is aching. I must water the flowers.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, November 15th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Letters at last, even a p.c. from Fiona, so I feel much happier, as I thought Anne's first letter addressed to our agents in Calcutta stayed there for ten days. I'm so relieved she has a job, I'm sure she'll be very efficient but probably get bored with it quite quickly.*

*Granpa said my article had appeared with a Moghul Emperor on the cover which is nice, shall welcome the cheque even more! Why don't you try a witch trial article, or is History Today a bit below your standards, it isn't actually anything more than tit-bits is it, but there's the money.*

*The idea for my book which seemed wonderful at the time is really rather dull, I'm calling it "The field of Panipat", there were three momentous battles of Panipat and I'm dividing it into three parts, each one starting with the battle and then going back to describe everything that led up to it – not very original but gives me the "shape" to work on. For the cover I*

would like to photograph the Moghul miniature I saw in Calcutta which is a gorgeous battle scene with lots of gay Moghuls on even gayer horses charging about.

No books have come and no answer from the National Library so I think I shall start writing the book and add to it as my knowledge increases.

I went to tea in a village on Friday and heard a couple of rather nice folk stories from a very drunk old man (my host) rather rashly said I would go and give English lessons there but more to get more stories than with any hopes of teaching them English I must admit.

Brenda and I are making a wild expedition to an island on the Brahmaputra on Wednesday, spending two nights there and witnessing a religious festival which no white woman has ever seen before! The island is the stronghold of the religious houses, sort of monasteries, of the Vaishnavite religion which is the chief one of Assam, we are taking most of the Bharali family with us (sisters and mothers etc. of the deserted wife) – they assure us that the monks are very clean – the idea of spending two nights with a lot of clean monks is a bit daunting but it might be interesting if we are in fact allowed to watch anything. I shall put the film into the camera at last (if the monks don't mind) and also see if I can't hunt out some more old histories as those are the sort of places they are lurking.

We drove up to the Brahmaputra yesterday evening to see if we could take any photographs of birds, needless to say the camera stayed in its case but it was very beautiful with the water hyacinths and boats and birds all outlined in gold as the sun went down behind them and we plan to camp up there one week-end, but!!

Apparently there is a very jolly new colonel at the military camp who loves shootin and fishin and loves anyone else to do it so I'm going to see him soon and try and arrange a trip into the hills, masses of Nagas are streaming down to the bazaar, women too, which is a good sign. It's such a battle to persuade Daddy to do anything though he usually enjoys it afterwards, but the Finneys and Tony are always game.

Our little waif Rosemary is coming down on 28th by air, she is thrilled to bits at flying but my heart sinks slightly at all the awful club evenings I shall have to endure when she's here, selfish of me I know. I went up to Jorhat on Thursday to get her ticket and went to see the Browns who told me that Anne's old school friend Katherine Shepherd is probably coming to stay here for the winter (they are old friends of the Shepherds) Katherine is doing voluntary service in north India and it closes down for the winter, I gather that it isn't the kind of v.s. that you applied for but the result of an exam and just for a year. Strange the smallness of the world isn't it.

By the way how are your classes going, I hope they still are. Detect a longing note in your story of the lucky man who got the fellowship,<sup>369</sup> but there might be a chance of that afterwards mightn't there? The more I see of this place the more hopeless it appears and one could go on bashing one's head against the stone of its indifference and lethargy for a lifetime without causing the slightest dent.

I am going to try to persuade the company to donate an empty bungalow in Nazira for a couple of voluntary service teachers, but I know before I start that it will be hopeless and they'll say they "need" it (it's been empty for years) I shall have to give up. A blistering novel on the tea industry is called for some time I think.

I do wish you hadn't bothered with a Christmas parcel, please don't if you already haven't, any ideas for yourself? What about some driving lessons so that you can use the car in the summer, you and Anne could shuttle it between you.

Much love from us both, Mummy



Boat with fruit on the Brahmaputra

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, November 24th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter and kind remarks on my article, Granpa said it was "interesting" and Granny made no comment at all, but I got £26.5.0 for it – rather an odd sum, perhaps they pay you by the words? Very much worthwhile, in fact I think article writing would be more profitable than books but I'm sure HTD will never take anything more of mine. Your turn now.*

*I'm concentrating as much as I can on the Moghuls but still have no books from anywhere so am frittering my time rather, I'm translating the odd folk stories in between but to write an imaginative childrens book I need privacy and concentration and have this child coming to stay for a month so will get little of either. I hope to do it sometime though.*

*Brenda and I made our trip to the holy island, but it wasn't an unqualified success, in fact in most ways was a total loss but like most of these outings, funny and interesting in retrospect. The trouble was the Bharalis who we took with us were impossible to get even faintly organised, and we saw nothing because they were always having meals or changing into new saris or deciding whether the mother was going to vomit – she started announcing her intention to do this on the crossing of the Brahmaputra and reiterated it at ten minute intervals – and finally did when we were least expecting it on Brenda's shoes!*

*We stayed in the Inspection Bungalow which was a bit forbidding, Brenda slept on the floor but at least we didn't have to share the one coal black mattress with the inspector of police as we had been told we should have to. We had to leave at 6 a.m. arrived on the island at about 1, and by four p.m. managed to organise two of them to visit a "satra" or monastery.*

*I had imagined lots of saffron robed figures drifting about, but it turned out to be a shack-like building with a tin roof badly in need of repair, two dispirited peacocks in a cage and a holy man sitting on a verandah with his disciples around him all dressed in grubby dhotis.*

*However the holy man, who had been in the monastery since he was 14, was a charmer with a lovely peaceful face, blue eyes and a deep gurgling laugh, when they told him I was inclined to Buddhism and Brenda was an atheist he laughed and laughed and said it didn't matter as long as we believed in love and non-violence.*

*I wished I could have talked to him properly but he didn't know a word of English and my Assamese doesn't stretch to philosophy – he said too that his thoughts were like waves but could not break over the great rock of his ignorance of English – he talked very poetically like a holy man should.*

*That evening we went to see the dance drama which was the centre of the festival, the story of Lord Krishna, but by 12.30 we were so tired we had to go home and the really good dancing didn't start till 4 a.m. The bit we saw was well done but as usual there were ten minute intervals between scenes.*

*Next morning we made a valiant effort to visit another monastery but only got half way there before it was time to catch the ferry back, endearing as the Assamese sense of timelessness is it is absolutely maddening when you're trying to stick to a timetable, and we plan to creep back sometime with a Dunlopillo mattress as I'm sure there are lots of fascinating histories tucked away.*

*The expedition was rounded off by making a muddle of the arrangements to be picked up at Jorhat and finally being rescued at one in the morning by Daddy and John Finney who had been haring about for five hours looking for us.*

*Brenda is not very happy after all and can't wait to get away from here, she feels (quite rightly) that she is wasting her talents – the trouble is that the reason a country is backward is because it is lazy, feckless and corrupt, and those are the qualities that sap ones enthusiasm fastest.*

*We have a visiting agent staying here for four days, he has just arrived and seems quite pleasant but I don't like having people always around to be talked to, can't be helped.*

*Rosemary arrives on Saturday and that's the end of our peace for a long time, but I shall somehow try to spend a couple of hours a day at my work.*

*So glad the classes are still going, you can have the £45 I get when my book is published for photographing those records, can't imagine anything I would like to do more in my retirement than browse through them and I agree that it would open up a new scene to historians and be invaluable.*

*Alas the Nagas have not accepted the peace terms and we're expecting an invasion any minute – so it doesn't look as if we'll get much river after all.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 26th November 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Got your letter yesterday and have just written to the bank asking them to transfer £40 to your account, also told them to let you have small overdrafts in future to tide you over crises – your Oxford branch seem excessively suspicious, remember the trouble I had with them trying to prize five pounds out of them. Don't bother to pay back the £40 until and unless your able it has been a heavy quarter for us too but by January things will have eased off...*

*We have our director man staying, a pleasant, simple soul – can't imagine how he came to occupy his present (fairly) exalted position as he is very solid and ordinary, probably very*

*efficient on paper or something. It is rather trying having someone permanently underfoot, but actually he is out morning and afternoon and is very unassuming in between, it is catering that is a strain with my goofy crowd of servants and lousy cook, never mind I always feel these people should find out how we really live.*

*I have had a reply from the National Library and sent for some books, so in about a month's time I should be able to start work, if they have any of them. A sort of staleness has set in with my work and I feel it's pointless and nobody will ever want to read any of it as there is nothing new for me to say and who is interested as you say in old Indian history. This is just a phase I expect, I think it is being out of the historical orbit and living in a vacuum here with not a soul I can talk to about the things that interest me, except Brenda but even she isn't keen on history. She feels exactly the same about her snails. Must hurry back to the Gita for reassurance on the subject of "achievement".*

*Yes Anne sounds happy, expect you will be at the party and will see Fiona there and be able to talk to her perhaps? I haven't quite decided about Christmas but think I'll probably send a cheque to you, to either give them as money or as record tokens if you think that best. A pity you couldn't have got the car going to take you home in but someone might be able to drive by the spring. Maybe Fiona would like a course of driving lessons as a present? Sorry to give you so much finding out to do but I feel so helpless and frantic sometimes here.*

*No news since I wrote, I went to the club briefly on Monday but didn't stay to the film, I was trying to decide how to decorate it for our "spree" but came away as undecided as I went!*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, c. 3rd December 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm having a day in bed, nursing a cold – the dusty journeys I've been making seem to have made it worse than usual so I'm trying to scotch it this way. I spent the whole day in Nazira yesterday trying to decorate the club, my head was thudding with a hundred hammers & my throat & glands aching and all the ladies who had come to help me said what size stars should they cut out & had I got any scissors & practically nothing was achieved. In the end we decided on a lot of sort of rabbit hutches made of bamboo down both sides of the dance floor, it looks a bit like what I imagine a brothel to be, complete with lights covered with red crepe paper!*

*We went to the wedding of our assistant to an Anglo-Indian girl from Shillong on Saturday at the Finneys bungalow, Brenda had gone to vast trouble over the arrangements but the girl never gave any sign of pleasure or appreciation or lifted a finger to help. It was a very odd civil ceremony consisting of signing endless documents & the reception a bit sticky with a mixture of General Managers & young assistants. John Finney eventually started lighting huge rockets which filled the silences & got rid of most of the guests.*

*Granny sent me my only fan letter to date (which she had opened, to save a 1/3 stamp she said but I didn't quite follow this as she still had to send it!). It turned out to be from an old boyfriend I hardly remember so can't really be counted as an appreciation of the article!*

*My books have come from the Hakluyt Society so I'm dying to get down to them but have little opportunity with R. here, sometimes feel like chucking the Moghuls & trying to write a novel on the tragedy of this society – but Forster said it as well as anyone ever will & I could produce no "answers". According to Leach everyone in every society is working & planning for "power" but it seems to me that the impulse behind most people's action is the saving of pride – there is a word here "izzat" which is hard to translate – roughly "face" & the thing that everyone's life is directed at saving & enhancing... [rest lost]*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 10th December 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a long letter – we do appreciate your writing at such length when you must be sick of your typewriter by Sunday. I got my “History Today” yesterday, I think they did me very well, in spite of writing about me as if I was dead at the end! I agree with Cyril Connolly, the only thing is that one’s fear of not writing a masterpiece prevents one from even starting.*

*My typewriter still away but I’ll have it in a day or two I hope. My cold is much better though still keeps me coughing tiresomely at night, & I’ve passed it on to the rest of the household. I’ve started trying to teach Rosemary which is uphill as she knows nothing & in 3 weeks I can’t even lay a faint foundation. Her future is a blank, I can only see marriage with a planter as a possibility but they’re pretty chary of coloured girls though are very sweet in taking her round & making much of her.*

*The “spree” was pretty dreary. I was speechless by the day and after croaking at all sorts of dull people for five hours I came home and didn’t go back for the dance in the evening.*

*Brenda has thrown in the sponge & they’re going home in the new year, she feels alternately elated & depressed – I’m sad of course as she’s one of the very few people I really like – but can’t blame her. I expect they’ll come to see you & explain the hopelessness of trying to do anything here, apathy of Assamese & hostility of sahib-log presenting a really formidable barrier to one’s enthusiasm.*

*You’ll be starting off north soon, how I wish I was there “but I have promises to keep” – or try to, though I know in my heart I’m beaten before I start. Could you sometime go into Blackwells & ask if they got back the book “Indian Seamen” which they’ve again billed me for?*

*Much love – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Nazira, December 13th 1964

*My dear Alan,*

*It’s even more difficult than usual to work out if this will arrive in time to wish you a happy birthday, but you know whenever it does get there that we were/will be thinking of you on the day and hoping you will have some people you like with you. It’s odd that I’m still so near your birthplace and it certainly doesn’t seem twenty three years ago that I was sitting on the road verge clutching my stomach at one in the morning while Daddy tried to get the car we had borrowed started.*

*We still seem to be fairly disorganised with cars that won’t start and not much more money than then, but very conscious of our good fortune in you all – Rosemary and I were reading “If there were dreams to sell” for her English and discussing what we would buy and apart from that croft with the seals and otters I couldn’t think of a thing I lacked. My birthday wish is that you will have as nice children (and I was going to say husband!) as I have – and as “The Grapes of Wrath”<sup>370</sup> rather beautifully describes the mother, “mount pain and suffering like steps into a high calm”. I’m reading it at last, have been saving it up, or dodging it, I don’t know which, for ages. I’m glad you got the money, don’t bother to pay us back but perhaps you could give Fiona a few pounds to buy presents, I still haven’t worked out why she should be so short but she obviously is.*

*We’re all throwing off our colds, very slowly, even Daddy succumbed in the end and is croaking away. Rosemary’s was the least bad, she and I have been trying to do lessons in the morning this week but it is a fairly hopeless task. We spend long hours trying to decide what*



*is the best thing for her. I thought last year that she should come home but now I am beginning to doubt it, can't think of any job she could do. I think I'll try to get her going on typing and then she can go to Calcutta.*

*One cocktail party this week, and a service this morning when we sang carols while Brenda battled with an ancient organ in a howling draft and then rushed off to bird watch with her college boys. Now that she knows that she only has a few months left she is filling every minute with worthwhile employments, she says she is afraid you are going to be very disappointed with her but she looks better already.*

*We're going to Delhi in January for ten days, to stare at palaces and make contacts I hope. I wondered if the lecturer in Indian History could be approached for contacts? I'll leave it to you to decide and do this for me if you think it wise, but it would be very nice to know of someone to turn to for advice and chit chat. I shall probably stay a week in Calcutta afterwards to do my final reading, and start on the book when I get back. I just hope to make a lively and readable story, a personality history showing the reactions of the Indians to Europeans and vice versa, serious scholars won't want to read it so there won't be any need for an appendix and there are masses of books with chapters called "The Agrarian system under the Moghuls" so I don't think I need add to them. Can't really think who will want to but you say you kindly will and people have made the dustiest and remotest past live convincingly and tempted an audience to be interested. I shall try, even if I fail I will never regret the time and trouble I've spent as its been fascinating.*

*I hope the Edyes niece turned out to be nice, of course I remembered straight away that the name was Walker. Yes the Curries are vague relations, David Currie's wife is Jean Macfarlane's sister, they're in south India now.<sup>371</sup> Ceylon seems to be another sad muddle, what a bitter harvest is being reaped everywhere from the colonialist sowings, but one can't lay the blame anywhere particular. This isn't a very birthday letter but you know it brings all our love and thoughts.*

*Daddy hopes to write!*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Fiona and Anne, Cherideo, December 14th 1964

*Darlings,*

*Quite a Christmas feeling here to-day with rain pouring out of a black sky, the first winter rain we've had for several years and very welcome to the garden but not so much to the rice which is just being cut. This is supposed to arrive on Christmas Eve and I'm imagining the house simply humming with light, colour, Telly, brown paper, smells of milk boiling over and toast burning, and the church bells ringing romantically over the fields.*

*Rosemary is sitting on the carpet making paper chains which is the nearest we can get to it and Radio Ceylon is making its contribution to the Christmas spirit by playing an ancient version of Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer ceaselessly. We are all thinking of you and will toast you in the evening which will be about your lunch time and imagine you staggering from the table to the Telly to hear our not so little monarch – don't suppose you will be allowed to see even her shoulder at Such a Time! Nobody ever mentioned the weather but I'm dreaming of you even if you are dreading the thought.*

*Not a great deal of goodwill towards men is noticeable in Nazira P.O. at the moment, the result of the ballot on the club was overwhelmingly in favour of keeping a committee, but Jack S. has ignored this and appointed the Casserole as Steward to run it – in other words it will be him and Leslie [Sawtell]. So we (and I imagine lots of others) are resigning on 1st until such time as a proper system is restored. No loss to us but to the polo players rather a pity, and the place is a laughing stock.*

*Rosemary has been asked to the party at Sonari and there will be a day there at New Year for her too, hope I shant have to go. We had the two Esslemont girls<sup>372</sup> and the Rufus's<sup>373</sup> seventeen year old daughter for the day on Thursday and the gramophone went non-stop for a brief period in the afternoon when they went on an assistant-hunt, managed to corner Finn [Featherstonehaugh] but he got away quite quickly and they slipped home to console themselves with Cliff Richard again.*

*I met Terry on Monday and he has sent over all his records for us, long players by the dozen but the battery of the gramophone has given out, it was supposed to last 250 hours so even if we had played it 24 hours a day it shouldn't have gone so quickly. Can't say I'm sorry in some ways but it leaves a gap for R.*

*I'm spending every spare minute sewing of all dreary things, but good for me though the results are indifferent.*

*We are going up to Jorhat one day next week to do some shopping and I shall get some material for a dress for R. as I'm sick of trying to take out bones and plackets and put in grubby little zips and you know how grubby my zips can be. The Australian Hit Parade is on, Elvis Presley at the top, nothing changes.*

*Great excitement at that point as we noticed the fan buzzing round on its own & then clouds of smoke pouring out of the switch place so started hurling water at it & getting servants off to close the factory – when Daddy arrived a few minutes ago the bungalow was awash & he said water was the last thing we should use & why had we stopped the main engine & was not at all sympathetic – lucky it didn't happen in the night.*

*Our love to everyone in the house, and a very happy day to you all – and specially love to you three –Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Fiona and Anne, Cherideo, December 22nd 1964

*Hoping to get in one more combined letter before you scatter. You'll all be slumped round feeling anti-climactic I expect, but here we are right in the middle of the Whirl – i.e. trying to grind up some thick lumpy sugar to ice the cake with and decide whether to kill a poor old goose or dear little duck to eat up the river. Our plans have now resolved themselves into a picnic with the Finneys and possibly one or two more, we just couldnt rouse ourselves to give an evening party after the awful failure last year, it would have been different with Terry and John and Bas but this wet lot of youths and girls all going through their most difficult stages are too much for the most determined good will,*

*Rosemary has just gone off for the day with the Burke girls, she has really had a very gay time and been out nearly every evening somewhere or other, this is for the best provided district as far as men go and Finn Featherstonehaugh has been concentrating on her quite hard – so much so that I wonder sometimes if he will marry her but alas I think it is unlikely.*

*We did a shopping trip to Sibsager and I got Daddy a rather horrible tie and jerseys for all the Bacons and Porridges, it was one of those days when we kept seeing awful things like dead dogs outside the hospital and a bird that some children were torturing and I felt so depressed when I got home I felt I couldnt stay another minute – but on Sunday up the river there was the other side of the picture, beautiful and peaceful with wild untortured birds everywhere, Daddy took his camera and nearly got all sorts of wonderful photographs! Rosemary was bored but we took no notice, our irritation with her has gone, it isn't her fault that she's like this and equally there isn't anything we can do about it. The typing lasted two days, and met its Waterloo when she had to use her little finger!*

*We went to the club yesterday to see an ancient film with Clark Gable, Daphne and Babs were there, they have a most peculiar arrangement for their leave, Babs is going to Hong Kong, Daphne to Africa to see her sisters and John is spending his leave on his own! We got*

*involved in loud arguments and didn't get back till 1 a.m. and it was a freezing night, four blankets and I was still icy and couldn't sleep so am feeling very vacant this morning.*

*Wish you could be here to enjoy this weather, its blissful, breakfast on the verandah is like something out of a brochure with grass and egrets and cobwebs glittering in the misty sun, well you remember. Needless to say I'm constantly making myself miserable thinking about all those old ladies in their lonely rooms without enough money for the gas, but still manage to revel in it.*

*Have just started rather belatedly to make some paper chains and we shall have two little trees in the brass bowls, my first dahlia is out as it always is for Christmas. Cards rolling in from all the most unlikely people, next year I'm going to be firm and announce my intention of not sending any good and early, it's so hypocritical having tender loving messages arriving from Jack Simpson and the Barries and Indians one would never recognise if one met them.*

*Our trip to Delhi has been postponed again, now John is coming too and we're going to drive from here, taking three days but looking in at Benares and Agra and then the Finney's pushing on to see the Himalayas for a day or two. Their pass to Darjeeling was refused, don't know why, maybe the wicked aggressors are about again but they were very disappointed. I shall probably come back via Calcutta and do some reading on the way through.*

*Tony Connell is having his girls friend out for a couple of months so that is the next excitement, poor Tony he is very miserable and disillusioned, he is far too sensitive for this place, and yet in some ways that is just what one wants if it can be linked with a basic toughness and independence.*

*This is a terribly dull letter I can hardly keep my eyes open, have just washed my hair and am sitting in the sun drying it which is making me extra sleepy. My mynah is chortling away, he now says "Bearer" in a very gruff voice and makes the noise of the wire twanging outside the cookhouse but I don't think he's really very bright. Miranda has her winter coat and is very gorgeous.*

*My love to everyone – wonder where you're all sleeping!*

*All love – always, Mummy*

## 1965

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, January 4th 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Afraid this is a day or two late as I've been sending in every day for forms without any luck. Thank you for yours written while waiting for Richard, I was relieved to get it and hear about Anne as there had been complete silence from her for three weeks, however I got a letter the day before yesterday. She sounded rather tired and jaded but it was probably just the mood of the letter.*

*I wonder if you managed to dig yourselves out and get south again, though judging from the papers the south has had the worst conditions. Your lovely parcel of books arrived three days after Christmas which was wonderfully timed, and needless to say have been ecstatically received. Daddy pounced on Verrier Elwin but I've read the first three chapters and find it terribly entertaining, he has a delightful sense of humour which must have been the only thing that carried him through some of his experiences. I'm sure you will see yourself in him when you read it, his great desire to stay in Oxford and live the life of culture warring with his call to help the helpless and ignorant – of course I am more maddened than ever that I never met him. I'm reading Kierkegaard (?) as well, a name I've heard referred to so often so it is nice to meet him at last, and am dying to delve into the other books but am spacing them out.*

*Rosemary leaves to-morrow so I shall be able to take up my work again, I get terribly depressed just frittering my days on knitting and silly chatter which is all I've done for the last six weeks. I've written to her father asking if we can send her to this very good school in South India where she can learn typing, domestic science etc under Irish nuns, doubt if he will agree, don't know quite how we shall afford it either but one usually can muddle along beyond ones means, we've been doing it for years!*

*We spent New Year's Eve with the Finneys just chatting and discussing their future, John has applied for a job with a wild life trust doing research on the food plants of various duck and geese but seems doubtful if he will get it.*

*The Hon Peter Remnant arrives this week to drink our gin, sleep from lunch to dinner and unburden himself of some dreary clichés geared to our low mentality. This will cost a couple of thousand by the time he and his wife have done a cruise to Hong Kong as well, I'm going to ask him about giving a bungalow to a Voluntary Service teacher but it's hardly worth wasting my breath as he will say it's far too expensive a project, and the tea industry isn't a charitable institution after all, ha ha! We are also going to suggest that we finish a year early, i.e. this November instead of next, but there again he will probably refuse. We would spend the winter in India but in places relevant to my work or interesting in other ways and come home next spring – but this is only a dream.*

*I've now accepted the fact that I'll never be able to collect folk stories from the villages or old histories, and the most I can hope for is to get my Moghuls done and perhaps another childrens book, which I have simmering in the back of my head – a sort of mixture of "The Secret Garden" and the Jungle Stories! Where have you got to with your witches, has any pattern emerged or have you reached a decision about what it was that "caused" them? One of Verrier Elwins ancestors was burned as a witch, Holman I think was the name.*

*Rosemary is full of stories about Khasi witches who still sit in caves mixing love potions and so on, I must go and visit one when I go to Shillong. The Khasis are a tribe well worth studying in depth.*

*I'm sitting in front of the fire writing this with the rain pouring down, lovely, the rice crop is in and this is just what everybody needs. I shall be starting my teaching again next week,*

*17 out of 34 passed their Matric Test which was about average, so I don't seem to have made much impression one way or the other. Are you going to keep on your room at Oxford when you go to Essex?*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Notebook: Sunday January 10th 1965

Nearly 2 months have passed, the best of the cold weather. Rosemary, Christmas, the holy man of Majuli, and I haven't written a word. Chiefly due to Rosemary who wore me out, irritated me, amused & saddened by turns, also a heavy cold which dragged on for a couple of weeks.

The expedition to Majuli – I remember the porpoises sliding in & out as we waited for the ferry, the faint panic as the overloaded boat groaned out into the Brahmaputra, the inspection bungalow with one black mattresses and a smelly bathroom with taps that choked but gave no water. I remember most of all the holy man who sat on a grubby verandah on the stone floor all day long with an expression of great comfort and a gurgling laugh that rumbled up from some spring of sweetness inside him. He spoke of his lack of knowledge of English as a great rock that stopped his thoughts from pouring out and laughed uncontrollably when told I was a Buddhist & Brenda an atheist, saying what did it matter as long as we believed in love & non-violence. I wished I could have spoken to him properly, his disciples gave us hard rice & sour cream out of copper bowls & Brenda drank cloudy water that we hoped hadn't washed the holy feet. Later I sat next to him at the drama but we were both overcome by shyness, he aloof in his holiness & a white shawl.

The drama itself was a long long life story of Lord Krishna, in parts suddenly touching as the scene when the boy is carried across the raging river with a cobra bent protectively over him & a jackal as anxious guard, running ahead & then back to see if the precious charge is safe. The faces of the audience were rapturous and infatuated as the child Krishna stole the curds & broke his mother's pots & jeered at the milkmaids, even the old men lost in an approving dream. Unfortunately it went on & on with long intervals & by 12.30 we were exhausted, & went home, thus missing all the best dancing. I didn't sleep anyway, tossed on my slats with mosquitoes whining round my face & Brenda peacefully asleep on the floor.

The next morning was a nightmare, trying to organize our return to the river & a trip to another monastery & in fact doing nothing except wait for Mrs Bharali who finally appeared with a half-tin of Dalda to anoint some holy legs with, and an oft-repeated warning that she was likely to vomit. We piled into the jeep & drove along a high, narrow crumbling road until we could bear it no longer & insisted on turning back. Everyone sulked. Mrs B. muttered that she hadn't seen a holy man & would have to leave the island unblessed, and had her revenge on the way back by vomiting at last all over Brenda's shoes. Nevertheless the trip home in the evening light was very beautiful, and I felt immensely moved by the memory of the broken down monastery and the holy man radiating peace & love on its battered verandah.

And Rosemary – scruffy & unbrushed when she arrived with her case of smelly rags – gay, foolish, vague, empty, listless & affectionate. Every meal was occupied discussing Lynda ("She says she's quite white in the middle"), Finn, Chris, Lynda & Finn until I began to think nothing else existed & really cared what they thought. The wedding, Hulda's terrible hat & Alec & Simpson's brooding silences, & the giggly club meeting, and the row over Ray Corps. But this writing up the past is useless. I lose its flavour. My new year's resolution is to keep this journal - it may be our last summer.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Jan 11th 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your most amusing letter on Christmas, it made me very homesick. Also for sending that letter of Mr Strachan's. It's nice to find another Roe fan, I would like his book eventually but not at the moment as I have a pile of reading on hand, for my birthday perhaps? I'll see if I can dig up anything for him in Delhi but I'm afraid the white ants will have eaten any pictures that might have existed.*

*Our trip is fairly organised except that the Finneys keep changing their minds as to whether they're coming, did you think it a good thing to get in touch with either of those gentlemen whose addresses you gave me or not?*

*I'm sitting on the verandah waiting for Mr Remnant who is visiting this morning, we asked him if we could be released a year early, i.e. this November instead of next and he has come out to discuss this. It didn't sound very hopeful from his letter, or rather he is prepared to let us go on a reduced pension and this we shan't accept.*

*According to Robert Higham both he and Jack Simpson are going shortly which is wonderful news. I'm going to tackle him on the subject of a bungalow for voluntary service teachers, all I then need is a grant from the government and about two lack of rupees and I'm away. Daddy of course is as gloomy as anything about the whole project and he is absolutely right but I feel I must make a last effort.*

*I got a letter from my agent the other day and the publishers have decided to cut out all the background material from my book, he is cross about this but I have rather lost interest. Afraid it will hardly hit the best seller lists in its present form, I hope I don't have to pay back any of the advance!*

*Rosemary left last Tuesday, very tearful poor little creature and I felt guilty about the sense of relief I undoubtedly felt, and have missed her in lots of ways, but I just could not have gone on any longer doing nothing either. Afraid I'm not the stuff that Verrier Elwins are made of and my do-gooding instincts are geared to my home comforts.*

*Our only outing this week (apart from a dull dinner party at Roberts [Higham] ) was to a "reception" at Joysagar College where Brenda teaches. Between us we got into a muddle and arrived an hour early so sat in an empty icy hall waiting for the guests of honour, the Tea Board, who had donated Rs 50,000 to the college. The minute they arrived I set on the most sympathetic looking one and asked him for a similar donation to my model school and he said the idea would be "sympathetically considered" so I'm going to have lots of sympathy anyway! The reception consisted of speeches (quite short) and dancing and then tea and coconut ice and home, I had dragged Daddy along and he looked acutely uncomfortable and cold throughout, except for a slight thaw when the dancing girls appeared.*

*The main excitement of the week has been the arrival of Tony Connells fiancée from home, a very chic, blond, practical, girl, totally unlike Tony who has turned out a bit of a disappointment. He is the one who loved poetry, music, animals etc but in fact doesn't really do much except say he loves them.*

*I have made my last appearance at the club for a long time, lucky Verrier Elwin he never had this double existence to lead and could concentrate on the things he really wanted to do.*

*The weather is gorgeous still but with a slight extra warmth in the air and lots of bustle and noise from the birds, and crows are even starting to woo, very ponderous and funny and my mynah imitates the noise they make.*

*Daddy runs hither and yon with his camera but doesn't often manage to take a picture, however it is a great interest, yesterday morning we went for a long walk into the jungle and foothills as it's in a clearing full of tapping wood-peckers, the sort of place one might well see lord Krishna fluting*

*I suddenly feel a great longing to be back for a week end to catch up on all the little things that can't be said in letters, your classes for instance, I wish I could attend one.*

*I'm going to start teaching again in a few days, we're doing quite a lot of new building at my school, every time we try and make bigger classrooms the headmaster says he wants them for teachers rest rooms the teachers rest most of the time as it is even without rooms. He is busy choosing a bride and is much more interested in her dowry than the matric exam which is coming up soon.*

*Must dust down the red carpet and see if the requisites are in the toilet, will let you know in a day or two if we are coming home early but I'm really not at all hopeful.*

*Much love – are you permanently in Essex till March?*

*Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Jan 22nd 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*I've completely lost track of who I wrote to last, as you're the only person who writes at all regularly to me I really must keep some sort of account. I daresay your weeks slip past as soundlessly as mine do, though you seem to have a lot on your plate with tutorials as well, are you paid for these? You will soon be a world expert on the sociology of the Stuarts, one day when you have time could you send me a short resumé of some of the punishments meted out to witches – no hurry but I want to be able to show that the East was not especially sadistic or unjust in this line, an accusation always levelled at the Moghuls.*

*One of my travellers met a male witch near Mocha who described how he had made a "bluyd" pact with the devil to supply him with sacrifices. However when his son and daughters died he got fed up and stopped the sacrifices so the devil visited him in the shape of a young fawn "his heate being soe extreame that it putt out his eyes" (1608). I don't know if the devil as a red hot fawn has cropped up before, I expect it has.*

*Have you come to any conclusion about witchcraft, whether it was the remains of a pagan cult, psychological disturbance, clerical plot, or what? I wondered if the final shape of the thesis was at all clear in your head, with that vast amount of material I can't imagine how you will ever get it into any sort of shape, even with the few notes and cards I have in my little boxes I quail at the thought of "working it up" – I think I shall probably go on making the excuse that my research isn't finished year after year.*

*Our trip to Delhi is fixed, we're going by train all the way from here which may be terrible beyond words but is the cheapest way, as it is expensive and I just hope I can justify it. We leave at one in the morning of the 11th and get to Delhi on the evening of 13th, we pass through all the country associated with Buddha but I don't suppose we shall be able to see anything from the train.*

*My plan is to spend the first week soaking up atmosphere, visiting and photographing all the buildings, and going to the village of Panipat where the three decisive battles were fought, and then spending two weeks reading, I realize I won't be able to get through all the books I need in that time so will concentrate on getting the first section of the book noted and will have to make a trip to Calcutta in the autumn to do the last bit.*

*Brenda and I went to the wedding of the man who has started the model school in Jorhat, and met the English headmistress, she is sixty two, just like Margaret Rutherford and was dressed in a baby blue sari with gold sandals on her very large flat feet! An incredible sight,*



*especially set among all the beautiful graceful Assamese women, but she is quite a character with a good sense of humour and has been out here before working for the S.P.G. The only snag is she is far too old and I don't think will stand the hot weather. The bridegroom's father was Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University and has a superb library he let us look at (the old man was too shy to appear himself) full of books in every live and dead language, he himself understands seven including classical Sanskrit. He also had a pile of "History Todays" and I told everyone in a loud voice that I contributed to it but they all thought it was he who had done so which made me very frustrated but amused Brenda highly.*

*On the way there we visited the Government Silk Farm and saw brilliant green caterpillars with blue and scarlet dots crunching their way through mulberry leaves, and then later as butterflies being tied to bunches of sticks to lay eggs like battery hens – I had the most amazing dreams that night in which the caterpillars, the headmistress in her powder blue sari, Jack Simpson and I were all climbing a cliff together, it was all mixed up with my folk lore as there was someone in a castle at the top who was bewitched!*

*We have had an official letter to say that Remnant is going and that Sir O. Jenkins is to be chairman in his place which is wonderful news but not for a lot of people. We expect a visit from him soon, and a lot of trunks are being rapidly packed as a result, perhaps even ours but we wouldn't mind if they gave us our full pension. It's a pity this couldn't have happened sooner.*

*I think Sir O. will lend a sympathetic ear to my plans for a model school in Nazira, at least to the point of letting me use one of the bungalows for teachers, he is a very hard headed business man in some ways but not absolutely locked up in the world of finance, and approachable. A grant of land from government is my first need and I'm starting the ball rolling but fear it will roll very very slowly and am prepared for every frustration.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: Sunday Jan. 24th 1965

Sitting on the verandah, 1.30, a sore throat & a slight headache, orioles calling from the simul otherwise muted twitters. The first white butterflies drifting across the brown grass & faint chatter of rubber leaves, otherwise stillness with a pale blue sky pressing on it.

Last week Brenda & I went to Mr Handique's wedding reception at Jorhat, stopping for lunch at the silk farm. We sat at the corner of the tank looking across the water hyacinths to the temples, while a fishing eagle lazed across the lilies and villagers stopped to ask us who were and timelessness made us sleepy.

Afterwards we went to look at the Mugha caterpillars, brilliant green with red spots, except the little ones whose spots were blue. The man in charge (whose qualifications were an arts degree at Joysagar) stood with a bow and arrow to shoot "many enemies". And above us there was the soft but steady crunch of thousands of green jaws. A moving pattern of brilliant splashes all over the tree trunks gave the scene a slightly nightmarish quality, repeated when we went to a little house full of moths lashed by the waist to bundles of sticks while they laid eggs. The real silk worms were tiny heaving masses among chopped mulberry leaves. The whole place was delightfully vague, amateurish & overstaffed but very restful.

We drove on to the wedding reception reluctantly & it turned out to be the usual vague affair, everyone sitting about on carpets, Mr Handique unreal in a dhoti, and our only companions three missionaries & the headmistress, all plump & elderly & rabbit-toothed & dressed in pastel saris. They were very BRIGHT & girlish, easing their swollen feet out of their gold sandals & giggling, happy & fulfilled? Impossible to say. Afterwards we looked at Mr H's father's superb library, a man I must get to know if I can.

On Friday went to the Prize Giving at Gargaon College, arrived on time to find 2 members of the staff standing in chilly darkness outside an empty hall, we duly stood with

them until half an hour after the audience started to arrive. It was a jolly evening, the best part being the recitation by the English professor, a very fat, very wheezy gentleman whose rendering of "To be or not to be" will be one of my deathless memories – the only words he was sure of were "to die" and "to sleep", so he repeated these over & over again with different intonations, wheezing so alarmingly the while that we were afraid he would not return to the words.

I spoke briefly, wishing I had taken more trouble & managed Assamese, and afterwards the Principal got up & thanked me for the useful things I had said on the subject of Education – which I had barely mentioned! I got very cold and the result is that I'm now (next day Monday) absolutely streaming with my head hot & heavy and the rest of me freezing.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, February 1st 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Always a letter to thank you for – Anne has stopped writing altogether & F. back to occasional scrawls, so we appreciate the effort you make especially.*

*Afraid this will be a scrawl as I've been in bed for the last week with one of those awful flu headaches, "an infection of the frontal sinus" the Dr Babu placidly describes it but its far worse than shingles or my last major operation! The worst part is just lying with closed eyes, unable to distract oneself from the pain, this is where ones theories about disassociation fall so sadly to pieces! My only distraction was to stagger through & listen to Churchill's funeral! How much more beautiful, dignified & organised it was than Nehru's, and how much less it moved me. Perhaps because though I admired Churchill I never really liked him, he so signally lacked the qualities I do admire – humility, tolerance and kindness – to be a great war leader one can't afford to have them I suppose? I agree about Gordon Walker. I think Labour's doing fine, giving the country the shakeup it really needed instead of woolly clichés. I expect Robert will be one of the many breakers into ecstatic print over Churchill.*

*We're most impressed by your tutoring & addressing Christopher Hill, what are you doing about the tutoring money, I would love to see you with your disciples grouped admiringly around. I wonder if I will get to Delhi, only ten days away.*

*Will write again shortly – Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, Feb 8th 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*A slightly more cheerful scene here – I am up and headacheless, though still not feeling quite right, start to droop rather easily and sniff a lot. Daddy too hasn't thrown off the bug properly but it has been raining all week which perhaps hasn't helped, the sun is out to-day and everything looking so beautiful and refreshed. I'm sure we shall now pull up rapidly. I shall have to as I set off for Delhi the day after to-morrow, the prospect slightly appals me at the moment, rather reminds me of the way I felt when I did my last bit of research at the Bodleian, perhaps it is all a large neurosis, I did read somewhere that sinus headaches were a neurotic symptom – but what have I got to be neurotic about now?*

*Brenda has been staying from Wednesday to Sunday, yesterday, as John was on tour – it was nice having her as we get on very well and argue and argue round the same points ceaselessly. She will definitely come and see you if she comes to Oxford, she probably will as she might go into hospital there for a few days. part of her trouble here is that she is worrying that she hasn't started a family. Their plans are still unsettled as are ours because Remnant left a vacuum of vagueness behind him which is still unfilled – except by wild rumours. I hope something will happen soon as its unsettling for Daddy.*

*My plans for Delhi are fluid to say the least, I'm hoping to find a good library and read all day and in the evenings do some sightseeing but whether this will work out I don't know – also hope to make some "contacts" who can perhaps lend me some books to bring back. Have decided to make my book three sections, 25,000 words each side and a lump of 40,000 in the middle, my problem is going to be how to keep it down to that amount, even that is a bit long with illustrations.*

*I had another longer letter from Michael Strachan,<sup>374</sup> who is director of a shipping company and writes as a hobby, he has never been to India except in passing so I don't know why people like Coryate and Roe attract him. I was able to give him one fact about Roe which he didn't know which was very satisfying as he has been working on the biography for 2½ years already.*

*I thought Richard's article in the Spectator on Public Schools rather good and fair, but it riled Brenda who couldn't believe that masters solemnly sat round in their common rooms fretting about the table manners of the hoi polloi they might have to open their doors to or whether "they" would know how to use the toilets! Neither she nor John come from a Public school background and have rather cherished a hope to send their children to one, but Richard's sort of smugness quite put them off.*

*I had a letter from Anne at last, after five weeks, it turns out she has been using the firms franking thing instead of stamps and obviously all her letters have gone astray. She said she was going to see you so you can judge if she seems happy, I can't make out from her letter at all.*

*You might have Terry Luscombe popping in on you too – he is coming back to tea which is amazing, he just hasn't been able to settle at home at all in spite of getting engaged to a pretty Greek.*

*I'm reading "In pursuit of the Millenium"<sup>375</sup> at present and finding it fascinating but wonder how I dare to think of publishing anything when faced with such scholarship – it's only the thought of Robert that cheers me.*

*A dull letter but I haven't set foot out of the place for two weeks, I will write from the train which might be more lively, my address in Delhi will be 128C Western House, Curzon St. New Delhi in case you have managed to get those contacts, otherwise Daddy would like to get your letters here first and forward them.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: Thursday February 11th 1965

The cold turned into sinus headaches, that kept me in bed for over a week, feeling sickeningly ill. Now I'm on the train on the way to Delhi, very jolty, very grubby under a blue light, crumbs on the dark green seat, floor inches deep in dirt, sugar, oranges, water bottles, everything sharing the grime.

The engine hoots mournfully through the darkening world, we have just crossed the Brahmaputra on the new bridge. Very beautiful. violet hills & salmon water & little lights twinkling through the mist – kind, beautiful twilight that hides the squalor & persuades me that the dogs aren't starving & the children sitting weeping in their own excreta biting fly-blown biscuits, and the old men lying on sacking with rags over their heads, everything smelling of urine.

India is horrifyingly revealed on the railway stations, such beauty, life & vivacity, such hopelessness & degradation. A beautiful Lushai girl in an emerald skirt glides past a blind beggar led by a skinny child; goats with skinny kids pattering after them, lick tea cups abandoned by bearers on the ground; mangy dogs limp & snarl and scream as people kick out at them the bearer flashes his eyes & demands with a fearful leer if we want morning tea, he

is a meat-eater he says, not like these vegetarian Hindus, pointing at two giggling little friends.

Beggars poke our shoulders through the bars, 4 Naga boys share our carriage, very humbly crouching at the other end of the seat, all their savage grace gone in their badly cut corduroy coats and nylon socks & cheap pointed shoes. We have done nothing all day except stare out of the window at dun cattle drifting listlessly across dun fields, at a greener wetter country with Kingfishers (4 kinds) perched on telegraph-wires, an upright eagle, egrets & adjutant storks picking big feet across the mud. I don't know whether I'm enjoying it or not, a sort of listlessness grips me.

February 12th 1965

The sun is setting on another day in the train. this time on Bengal with pools reflecting its glow among the softened green of winter rice. The impression of land and more land but no people, except a tiny incongruous figure washing a buffalo or treading a long path across the endless greenery. We woke to beautiful hills with the sun rising behind them, quite close to us, very erect & fresh. Then the Manas river, hill & man-guarded & then bleak featureless Bihar, all gravel & heaps of coal being shovelled by nearly naked hardly human figures.

I've spent the day lying in the sun, washing the grime off my hands, eating hard boiled eggs & searching at stations for boiling water. At the last station I was going to the bookstall to buy "Akbar" when the train started to move out, nightmare. My head is aching a little but full of the smell of jasmine, a garland an old man gave.

Iris to Alan, Delhi, Feb 18th 1965

*My Dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid my intentions to write on the train came to nothing, I did complete two grubby wobbly letters and then gave up. I've been in Delhi five days now and still feel slightly dazed and wake up each morning wondering where on earth I am and why. However to go back to the beginning, our trip started in true Indian style by the stationmaster announcing at Simulguri where we started that he had only booked one berth, the others were "on waiting list". This list turned out to be something that only existed on paper so we were a depressed little crowd standing on the station at two in the morning waiting for the train, however when it came we found we had a large four berth compartment to ourselves, and for the next three days we continued this way except for a short while when four Naga boys cowered in a corner very self-effacingly and ate onions.*

*The journey was really very good, it is restful to just sit hour after hour and let India slide by, the only awful part are the stations which are full of starving humanity and animals, and beggars arms prod you through the windows and flies settle on the whole horrible scene in thousands, my idea of what hell must really be like.*

*We got out at intervals in search of boiling water for our thermoses and at one station Brenda said she had seen "Akbar the Great" in paper backs so I tumbled out to get it and while half way down the platform turned round to see the train sliding out. Much hysterical screaming and dropping of my shoes as you can imagine, I wonder what I'd have done if I'd been left there without money or food and only Akbar in two vols to console me!*

*We got here exactly on time on Sunday evening (both trains were on time which is more than can be said for the days of the Raj). I'm sharing a room with a sister of a friend in Assam and another girl who is working in a Family Planning clinic so you can imagine we have plenty to talk about. It is slightly more chaotic than Mauldeth Road<sup>376</sup> if you can imagine that, our three string beds occupy all the space that isn't taken up by clothes and*

*cooking pots and we cook on a little kerosene stove on the verandah which is equally congested. However as I'm out all day and hotels are wildly expensive I'm happy to stay here and am managing to throw together picnic lunches and boiled eggs for breakfast which we eat sitting on our beds, and at present I'm waiting for a bucket of water to heat with an electric rod plunged in it which is thrown over one for a bath – don't mention this to Daddy by the way as he'd be cross to think I was being uncomfortable just to save a "a few rupees" as he would call it, actually hundreds!*

*The main thing is that I'm settled in at the National Archives where I tootle off every morning in a funny little car cum scooter and stay till about six p.m. when my head is like old blotting paper and quite unable to absorb more.*

*The girl here knows somebody everywhere, I think she said she had an auntie who could introduce me to the President, anyway one of the innumerable aunties works in the archives and got me in and they have a very good library as you can imagine and are helpful and nice in spite of making me fill in about five forms every time I want a book and then disappearing with them for several hours, one has to plan ones reading several days ahead.*

*There are several other "white fellers" working but I sit at a table with an enormous Sikh in an emerald turban who belches alarmingly and often and I try not to jump but fail each time. I eat in the park opposite but today had to remove myself for a football game.*

*Delhi is a good deal grubbier than when the Raj were here and they are inclined to wash their clothes in the tidy little squares we set out but everyone is very gay and happy and friendly, of course this isn't the shummy area which is old Delhi and I expect quite horrible.*

*I'm leaving my sightseeing to week/ends, am catching a bus to Panipat on Saturday (where needless to say Usha has an auntie) it seems rather an anti-climax to go to the great battlefield where India's fate was decided by bus, anyway I don't suppose theres much left of it. I'm leaving Agra till next weekend, the Finneys saw the Taj with a full moon rising over it and were spell bound, otherwise they have found it all rather tiring and have gone off to the hills where there is ten inches of snow.*

*It's cold here actually, I wear two sweaters, most surprising. I'm staying on an extra week and going back by Air Conditioned Pullman to Calcutta and flying up to Gauhati which is no more expensive and much simpler on my own.*

*My bucket of water is boiling and I've then got to try and get a meal on the kerosene stove, its rather fun actually (for a short time) and I feel well and have quite got rid of my sinus in spite of the clouds of dust on the train.*

*Haven't heard from Daddy but hope he is managing with his nine servants, its bliss not having any, we get our veg and eggs from a little canteen down below, the only thing I don't reckon to much are the toilets but I rush in and out with as much detachment as I can muster.*

*Thank you v. much for the addresses. I've written to one but not had an answer as yet – expect he thinks I'm a dreadful amateur.*

*Much love, Mummy*

My father wrote from Cherideo on 25th February, 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*You will probably have heard from Mummy telling of her exciting journey and the fact that she has found some books that will help the work on the Moguls considerable. I must say I take my hat off to her the way she has stuck it out with frustration at every turn. She is a remarkable little woman. She left with a full three days train journey in front of her and she hadn't really recovered from her cold etc. John and Brenda are back and Mummy comes back early next week, thank goodness. I really go round the bend when she's not here. Anyway had drinks with the Finneys last night and they were full of their adventure, and said*

*how well Mummy was looking, sleeping and eating. I must have a dig at her, it seems that being away from me does her good!*

*My life is very hum drum at the moment, sort of "in between seasons" with nothing much doing in the garden or factory. I am actually going down the valley quite a way, to umpire some polo on Saturday. In a moment of weakness, I foolishly accepted to do so and shall no doubt pay for it by not being able to sit down for weeks. I haven't ridden a horse for at least four years.*

*We have a host of big noises descending on us during the next few weeks. Our new Chairman Sir Owain Jenkins amongst them. We expect sweeping changes from him and I shall probably find myself being swept into retirement with his new broom, I hope so, we shall have to wait and see.*

*Have had long letters from Fiona & Annie who both seem well and cheerful (letter from you also of course). Annie astounded me by saying that her bank balance was now "only £86.6" as she puts it. We all know where to go if we are on the rocks. Excuse the scribble Alan, my usual enterprising effort. Any ways takes all my love and hope all goes well. Daddy*

Iris to Alan, Delhi, Feb 28th 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*My last morning here, I leave this afternoon for Calcutta, feel sad in a way, have got attached to this grubby little room and the sparrows who hop amongst the saucepans while we cook. Still civilization will be pleasant too, a hot bath especially, I have a thick coating of dirt and feel I should be scraped with a palette knife before soaking.*

*I spent yesterday in Agra, "doing" it on a conducted tour. It seemed the only way to cope without ruining myself. I set off from here at 7 in the Taj Express, a very efficient and clean diesel train, I went 3rd class which is usually unthinkable but except for the seats which were slatted wood and will have left me grooved for some time, it was spotless and very cheap meals were brought to one on trays and it only cost Rs 10 return which for 300 miles is pretty good.*

*On arrival there was a bus waiting for us which rattled us all over Agra all day and finally deposited us worn and gritty in time to catch the same train back. We went to Fatehpur Sikri first, Akbars "deserted city" – red sandstone and green grass; courtyards and arches, lovely and solid and quiet or would have been if it weren't for us galloping across it in pursuit of our guide and other similar harassed parties. At first I thought I'd stick with him in case he had something interesting to say, but found his history fuzzy to say the least, mostly totally inaccurate. There were also lots of jolly Bengalee gents full of quips about concubines and a young man with a transistor which was giving a ball by ball commentary on a cricket match – normally I would have found this funny but Sikri is rather a special place which I remembered as steeped in peace and ghosts – finally I settled myself against a wall while they galloped off and I watched some parrots nesting in the cracks of the red wall.*

*It is about ten miles from Agra so by the time we had got there and back it was time for lunch, and then on to the fort and the Taj. By then I'd got the hang of things, and drifted around with my camera on my own, the fort is lovely, from the white marble pavilions you get a view of the Taj across the river and though there is little left of the gold and jewels there is still some beautiful inlay work.*

*The Taj, being Saturday afternoon, was a mass of sightseers, but nothing can detract from it, in fact the women's saris drifting about the grass and reflected in the long pool added to the beauty. I didn't attempt to follow the guide but sat and stared and stared, every time you take your eyes off it you expect it to have floated away, it seems to be just a cloud capped tower in spite of its great solidity. Inevitably a couple of boys came and sat beside me and*

*asked me a stream of questions, my age, what was the capital of Russia, did I know Hindi, on and on till I could have screamed. I had to move off and sat near a bush in which two brilliant blue humming birds were nesting and out of which a mongoose appeared and sat for a long time staring round and blinking in the sun.*

*Of course we got terribly matey, there were three yanks, quiet and young and un-corny, and a nice young English couple who are drifting round the world on their way to Australia, and a smooth young man from Gujerat pressed choc ices on me and admitted (the first person who has) that he was terribly rich. We ended up in the bazaar to shop but all I bought was biscuits for the starving dogs and after the Taj the contrast of their sores and ribs was specially poignant, and of course the beggars came out and held out their fingerless hands and that is what I'll remember of Agra. No thats not true, I shall remember the sun soaked courtyards and the fluted marble pillars with the flower designs inlaid in them and lots more but the dogs and the beggars will always be there waiting.*

*The day before I met Dr Grover<sup>377</sup>, whose name was given by Major Harrison whose name your professor gave me. I had got cold feet about getting in touch with him, couldn't find him in the telephone book and kept putting off trying to reach him but of course when we did meet he was charming and told me how much he could have done for me and I kicked myself. He is quite young and looks more like a rugger forward than a scholar and couldn't have been kinder, took me out to coffee and cakes, wrote the names of books all over the menu and then took me round to his pet bookseller who now can't do too much for me. He is going to write to me about more sources, and also knows of an early portrait of Roe which is going to please my friend Mr Strachan, he has been to Oxford and Germany and hopes to come again next year so perhaps we can repay his kindness.*

*His particular field is revenue and I think like most specialists he is surprised that anyone can imagine there to be any other, and looked a bit doubtful when I tried to explain the sort of book I was writing. I can't judge at the moment how much work I've accomplished here, but hope it's enough to write the first section.*

*I did some other sightseeing during the week and climbed the stairs down which the Emperor Humayon fell to his death, I don't wonder, being an elderly opium addict I'm surprised he was ever allowed to go up them, I got frightful vertigo and had to hold the chowkidars hand.*

*I wonder if you could get the wheels moving about getting a gramophone for Fiona, I think that is what she would like don't you, it'll have to be H.P. I think so if you could make the arrangements we will pay you back. I'll leave it to you to decide on what make, rather better than the old one but not in the luxury class and reasonable light. I thought of the £15-£20 price range, but a bit more wouldn't matter. Rather better than your Gita, I still feel guilty about that. Can't get out of Fiona what she has done with the camera and film we left with her?*

*Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: March 1st 1965

*My anniversary night, and I'm spending it under a mosquito net in the rest house at Dum Dum. The fan grinds & outside I can hear the subsiding whistle of a jet. My whole Delhi trip has gone past without recording it, my pyjamas smell of sweat & I'm full of omelette, toast & fizzy fresh lime.*

*This time yesterday I was lumbering down India in my A.C. coach, a very dry India, Gaya<sup>378</sup> was a dusty place full of quarries, there were funny jutting hills but mostly it was miserable scrubby land until we got to Bengal when it grew full of pools reflecting the pink of saris & the gold of brass pots and bananas & buffaloes & an air of fertility.*



We were locked away from the beggars but the dogs were still there, my whole trip has been saddened by them, the worst in Agra when still dazzled by the Taj we stopped our bus in the bazaar & they were worse than ever I remember, a puppy that drew its tail from under its stomach to wag it at one when I fed it with fried batter balls and looked at me with those imploring eyes I shall see till I die. "These people cannot even feed their children" said a man in a grey silk coat sneeringly. I know it is true & as I fed the dogs a woman held out her fingerless hand & the young man from Gujerat who had been so attentive drifted off in his pointed shoes embarrassed & critical.

I shall write in more detail – but the things I remember about Delhi are the morning awakenings to the smell of kerosene & chapattis, the cold fungussy smell of the library, my lunches in the park, the paper bag sweating a little, taxis hooting, grey & black crows, skippy squirrels with stripes down their backs, the stairs Humayon fell down with the pigeon hatching, & my day in Agra starting with crows wheeling against the sunrise & a new moon hanging in the smoke over Delhi station.

Notebook: March 3rd 1965

Back by my fireside with Tess on the rug beside me – and back on my rug under the mimosa which is in full bloom & the air heavy with it. Sun on my calves & the stroking of a small wind the pointed red candles lighted on the rubber trees, moths in the grass and a murmur of birds. The shrubs are a dazzling fountain & the flower beds full of gold & purple & it is peaceful & sleepy. Now that we are going I am watching & treasuring. The spotted deer are preening themselves under the mimosa & I'm going to sleep.

Delhi. The hostel – the girls lying on the grass outside their rooms drying their hair, the crows in the trees, the hooting of horns, wireless playing Indian music. The smell of the lavatories, the wash basins cluttered with curry & tea leaves, our tiny room smelling of kerosene with the striped orange bed-spreads, the two modern paintings, the mess & muddle, boiled eggs & omelette off the tin trunk on the verandah with sparrows hopping on the ledge, the bucket full of dirty dishes, the bucket for washing. Usha in her pyjamas with her hair down, the thud of the morning paper. The skill with which Usha made chappattis, her fingers pointed & stiff as she mixed the water & Atta on a brass tray, the delicious mealy smell as they cooked.

The bumpy ride on a scooter to the archives, the long straight gold-lined road from India gate, the daily struggle with my purse to find change. The chill misty smell of the library, the huge Sikh in the emerald turban who belched shatteringly, stepping out into the warm windy world for lunch, crossing the main road, settling down by a tree with the tank in front of me, very hungry & fuddled. The children in scarlet & grey walking past me to school, cool coffee & bananas, & then back into the archives, sleepy now, the afternoons work an effort, my head feeling both full & light. Walking out dazed at 5, into town to eat an omelette and toast & tea, or back to our room for tea & bread and marmite, cheerless, tired & rather flat. A struggle with the bucket, to wash myself, my teeth, my clothes, padding to & fro in my duster coat with soap dishes. Writing letters on a chair & then the last battle to get a bottle & crawl between my blue sheets. Crow-wakened, refreshed, hungry, to start another similar day.

Red Fort. A hair raising ride in a four seater, to be thrown out in a grubby bazaar full of fly-blown fruit, across the road the walls of the fort. In front, scooters, saris, a man dangling a mongoose & a snake, running it backwards & forwards across the hot dry road. The band in scarlet coats and white turbans, picturesque but grubby dirt, poverty, colour & the fort closed.



Red Fort in Delhi







Moghul gardens. A dream-like place, the garden Alice saw through the tunnel, the garden Babar dreamed of, velvet and jewels, air full of orange blossom, warm, bee-humming. Pools reflecting beds of gold & purple pansies, red walls supporting shrubs, steps leading up into little private gardens, down into an amphitheatre with the massed flowers in terraces reflected in a pond in the centre. Cypresses casting dark blue shadows in which grey wagtails flitted fluttering saris moving along the sandstone paths, baby oranges among the blossom.

I sat by the terraces with my eyes half-closed, dazed with the beauty, feeling like Babar that this was the moment for a 'collation' – to drink sherbet from a green jade cup, to hear music, to stay locked in this peace for ever. Yet it was unreal, outside were the rubbish heaps being picked over by starving dogs, the beggars, the sad little sellers of trinkets nobody bought, the people who would never be let in.

Humayon's tomb & Purana Quila<sup>379</sup> Green locked in a world of soft grass & palm trees & straight paths, archways & then the red mass of the tomb with its white marble workings. The windy slabs of the parapet, the parakeets, the bullock pulling a lawn mower under the palms beneath a leaf-laden lake. The high serenity, standing leaning against the warm stone wall with the wind in one's hair & the plain below one & the shriek of the parrots. Just down the road was the ruin of Sher Shahs city & the steps down which Humayon fell, Sher Shah being his evil genius to the end. Here there were piles of wood & rubble, a yellow school & rough crumbling walls with a lovely ring of stairs at their base, & other steps leading up into black bat-filled vaults. It was huge, unadorned, rugged & neglected, and I sat on a step & ate chocolate & felt very peaceful & happy. Then I went to look at the library, passing a neglected mosque, thorny scrub, a sleepy chowkidar & the door of the little building was opened.

The steep spiral stairs were filthy & in the corner of a step a pigeon flew off its eggs. The chowkidar held my hand & I was trembling when I reached the central room & looked out at what was Humayon's last view – now dreary scrub & rubble, then gardens & buildings & walks & Persian horses & umbrellas. I could go no further, but imagined how the little building must have resounded to the crises of his horrified nobles as he lay at the foot of the stairs, blood pouring from his forehead & ears, his long journey back from Persia, through Kabul, ending in an undignified heap here. When we came down the egg had changed into a baby pigeon which was flapping its little pink wings in the straw. We shut the door on it, and on history, but I stood for a long time after the chowkidar had gone, unwilling to leave, suddenly imprisoned in history, bemused by the warmth, the wonder of it all.

Agra. Got up at 6 & crept about making tea in the dark, drinking it as I stared out at a small floating moon, the air white and exciting with all the early mornings in India imprisoned in its smell. The taxi driver was asleep & had to be dragged out, a shawl round his head, & the taxi wouldn't start but finally we got to the station which was deliciously exciting with the smoke & the sunrise & the crows. I was one of the first in the carriage, which was spotless through the ridged wooden seats made grooves in one's bottom. The journey to Agra was lovely, except for the squatters settlements where everyone was in fact squatting, filthy tin hovels with grey figures squatting over fires, & next to them mansions with swimming pools & tennis courts. We passed 2 enormous bheels<sup>380</sup> with a thousand birds perching & wheeling in the gold water & then the country became grey again & arid. At Agra we got onto a bus where our guide flashed his false teeth & said he would tell us "each and every thing" about what we would see. There were 2 yanks, one looking like James Stewart who said "Gee look at those Indian tangerines" & the other little & podgy with hair like dry moss. Two children in front with hideous parents, thick sweaters & overcoats, fretful & runny-nosed & much doted on. A Phillipino in a black shirt, very handsome, a young man from Gujerat with green eyes who attached himself to me in the afternoon, & gave me a choc ice, and an English couple, the man bearded with a kind intelligent face, the girl floppy haired & skin without make-up, like Fiona's friends. The journey to Fatepur Sikri, brilliant & dusty, the bazaars full of saucepans of curd covered in flies, donkeys, every-thing sand-coloured when it wasn't brilliant, even the dogs. The holy men carrying Ganges water under bright paper canopies with little bells attached, no water, no bamboos, only sand houses and occasionally bright Corn, & bullocks in the silver topped horns.

Fatepur Sikri – as lovely as I remembered but full & hot – panting after the guides, standing in doorways looking out onto courtyards bright with cannas, solid, sun-soaked, high above the plain – but very small too. In the end I stopped panting & sat in the shade watching parakeets disappearing into holes in the red wall, a small painted elephant, beggars & two hot little monkeys hauled to their feet to dance whenever anyone passed. The funny man was in full flight here, & I felt a bit sad & cross. The fort was better – the long bricked slope up to the gate, the views of the Taj from between the little gold domes, the beauty of the pillars inlaid with irises. But I didn't really get the hang of the lay-out, not properly. The Taj as ethereal, solid, serene – what adjectives can one use? The saris drifting past the water, two blue humming-birds & a mongoose, fat toothy Australians posing, too much beauty, one had to look away not to be dazzled. The day ended with a fight with two huge taxi-drivers, a beautiful unforgettable day.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 7th March 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Back on my verandah with the sleepy Assam air sapping me of my energy and the Taj Mahal is a rapidly fading dream, amazing how quickly it all dissolves and one forgets the things one thought one never would.*

*I had a very easy trip back, sitting in an air conditioned Pullman train for 24 hours to Calcutta and after a night at the airport flying up to Gauhati without incident except that we were two hours late starting. I was so full of sights and smells when I got home I felt like a sponge, and in love with India all over again.*

*Assam seemed very beautiful and peaceful and green after the poverty and dryness around Delhi, and I felt envious of its isolation and backwardness and longed for it to be left alone. Rural poverty is nothing compared with the hopeless squalor of towns, and anything in the way of industrialisation here would mean an inrush of Sikhs and Marwaris (the money lenders of Rajasthan) and the Assamese would be far worse off than they are now. However it will come, and it will be their fault, if it is a fault to be lazy, genial and unambitious.*

*I found Daddy very well and fat, ditto dogs, and the news that we shall almost certainly be leaving here this November. The last details have got to be worked out, but as far as we can gather the company are to give us full pay for a year and then our full pension so we really couldn't ask for more. I'm not telling the girls until we have seen Sir Owain just in case a snag arises, but I don't think it will. At first I felt a terrible sadness and emptiness, thinking of never seeing India again, never making my model school, collecting my folk stories and so on, but now I am happy about it. I don't honestly think I would have ever done any of those things, there is too much to be overcome and I haven't the time and energy.*

*I've heard that remarks have been passed about my English teaching when I'm not "qualified" (from the Assamese) so you can see what one has to contend with. Also there is to be a complete upheaval in the company as far as we can see Nazira is to go and it's going to be run from Calcutta, very ruthlessly, efficiently and cost-consciously so there will be no room anywhere for people like us. We haven't decided what we shall do until we find out about the tax angle, we may have to fill in time till March and then come home, in which case hope to get a little cottage on the south coast and drift home in a cargo boat. Lots of problems, Granny, dogs etc. but they will all be solved and I shall be able to help you with your thesis?*

*I agree with your ideas of your future, and a job such as you visualise might be available here, there is masses to be done in social reform and research but the trouble is to find the two things situated side by side – also in a country where so many are jobless they are not keen on outsiders doing anything if they can help it. There is a school in Mussoorie for 1100 Tibetan refugee children and the only two European teachers have been thrown out though the Indians are apparently totally disinterested in the children. This kind of attitude is something you would have to face up to, also a very small salary, but still the rewards would be great. I bet the minute we step onto English soil you will all head for India!*

*I've spent the week catching up on letters and baths, gardening (my garden is gorgeous) and typing my Delhi notes which look awfully meagre now.*

*Last evening we went down to the lines and watched some dancing, a particular caste from Orissa were having a competition and at the end they all got together and prayed for you and the girls and us, beating their drums and waving yak tails over our heads, it was all so touching we were nearly in tears and is a foretaste of what we are in for when they know we are going. The labour absolutely adore Daddy and we shall have to face awful scenes.*

*It's raining – wonderful, it has been so sultry and dry and this is just what we want, we went up the river yesterday for lunch and took the dogs, very restful, I made chapattis over a wood fire and we were both writhing with indigestion all night!*

*Of course we shall have an exhausting summer thinking of things we shant see again but it has to come, and the social life here is really getting us down. Brenda is off on the 9th and John two months later, I hope they'll find something to do at home.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan. Cherideo, 16th March 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, sad to think you won't be sitting in your cosy little basement room any more. I'm hoping Robert will decide to move to Oxford, it'll be just the job for all my researching. Thank you for arranging the gramophone, but please let us know if you want another loan, now that Christmas, the car and Fiona's fees are dealt with we are surfacing again and the fact that the bank knows our provident fund will be coming at the end of the year will make them more understanding (actually they are very understanding as it is).*

*We have now decided to come straight home in a cargo boat, calling in at south Indian ports, so will get there in January. I had planned a trip to Ankor Wat but instead we're spending the money on bringing Anne out to do the homeward voyage with us, and also sending Dinah home. I may be able to see Ankor another time but if not it will remain a wonderful dream and probably better that way. Fiona will probably moan, but we will give her the equivalent amount next year when she finishes, and something to you too for that world trip.*

*The main problem this year is the A.P's, I have either Exmouth or Dale Cottage in mind but they don't seem keen on either.*

*I have spent the week battling with a sore throat and glands and think I've got the better of them, we had a tiring week end with the Scots padre and wife and friend staying. They are a kind and generous couple, but the wife is a compulsive talker and we sat up till after midnight both nights in a sort of mesmerised daze while she prattled and prattled. The friend was a Baptist missionary and utterly speechless, plain and drab, why do missionaries always turn out like that I wonder, or is it that they start that way and find some sort of psychological relief in their work. She has been touring India for the last three months and had absolutely no comment to make on any of it except a slightly sneering remark about the Buddha which she pronounced wrong.*

*Apart from that I have been trying to sort out my notes, and am putting together another article for History Today, haven't really much hope that they will want anything more about the Moghuls yet but it's a good way of getting myself organised for the first section of the book which I'm going to start very soon. It's amazing how much one knows and wants to include when one gets started, my problem is going to be how to keep the words within a reasonable limit. It's difficult to know exactly how much use my trip to Delhi was, but as its obvious I shan't get there again I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I think I'll write a better book for having soaked up the atmosphere of the Moghul buildings and gardens, I hope so anyway.*

*The problem of your future seems to be exercising you, I can think of so much you could do here that would satisfy your every urge, i.e. in the Garo hills where fish farming, school work and anthropology would all be welcome, as Dr Verrier Elwin said everything about the Garos is terribly out of date. I think I'll put out feelers to see what openings there are, the only trouble would be the loneliness of having nobody of your own background to talk to but perhaps you could take on for a period of so many years. I fear India is in for an upheaval*

*before too long, Shastri is obviously not the man to cope, nice as he is, and something must be done.*

*A very dull letter, but life is somnolent & warm, the air is heavy with the smell of lime blossom & the coppersmith tonks away and time is naught. It is the big Hindu spring festival this week, my last Indian spring.*

*Most impressed with your dinners with the Master of Balliol.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 23rd March 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, and also for fixing the gramophone – but will pay this off ourselves, starting next month. Now that the bank knows we're retiring all should go swimmingly where overdrafts are concerned! So glad you're not leaving 38 Park Town though it does seem rather a lot of rent. I was thinking that Essex might be a good place for the A.P's to retire to, is there any chance of your being able to drag yourself from the Archdeacons doings to visit the local agents? We visualise a small, central house or flat with a little garden, within walking distance of shops and a bridge club if poss. Granny isn't apparently too well and has been told to rest so I don't like to think of her packing up and moving this summer so there isn't really a violent rush but you might make enquiries about the sort of thing Chelmsford has to offer and prices?*

*Going to Ankor Wat and Japan was going to be so expensive I really didn't feel justified in spending the money even if we had it, what with those millions still starving, I'd rather buy a couple of crofts and turn them into homes for poor little Manchester children if it comes to that. Also we are hoping to have Anne out to do the voyage back with us.*

*I've spent a disjointed week trying to get back into a routine but with constant interruptions and consequent frustration. My boys are taking their Matric this week poor dears, I shall start teaching again very soon, I wonder if you could get the rest of that course "Essential English for foreign Students" from Blackwells and have it sent to me, I will find the necessary. Ian Leetham never had returned that book by the way but says he now has.*

*There was a riotous week-end, with a polo match on Saturday and all day cricket on Sunday and also the Calcutta cup in the evening, very wearing particularly as it was simmering hot. However now that I know I have hardly any of this meaningless social life left it doesn't bother me at all and I see everyone as a character in my future Telly dramas.*

*The Gussel Browns were down with their daughter who is pretty, they had just had Annes old friend Katherine Shepherd staying. She is doing V.S.O. work in Murree and is bored and fed up with it, they've sent her to a school like the other girl I've mentioned full of rich mens daughters, with nobody of her own age and no outlets or recreations, it does seem somewhat pointless. She is coming back to Hull University soon. One almost feels like writing to the papers about this voluntary service and its misdirection.*

*Has your W. E. A. come to an end voluntarily or through lack of interest?*

*The Rosses came for the night on Saturday, Morag is supposed to be starting at University in September if she passes her Highers. We hope very much they will come here when we leave but they don't seem to think it likely, two of our gardens are up for sale so it doesn't really ease things much our going.*

*I've finished my article which hasn't come to life and makes me despondent about my book, but maybe it's just because I've read it through about a hundred times, seems just a mass of clichés and facts nobody wants to know. I think I'll send it to you to read first to see if I'm right. No letter from the Delhi prof. so perhaps he thought I was just a silly female after all, no answer from Ajmer Museum<sup>381</sup> or the National Library or anywhere else I've*



written to either. A book I want (but not if it's expensive) is called *The Pearl Fishers* by Hollis<sup>382</sup> – the life of Francisco Xavier.

*Very dry here but the air spring like with heavy eastern scents, the driver has just remarried on the strength of it, a young widow with two small children so he now has five to support, honestly it makes me shudder, if anything happens to him what on earth will become of them all.*

*Family Planning is creaking along but not really caught on yet, but there is to be a big new company hospital with 300 beds and more doctors so perhaps that will help.*

*Brenda is off in a fortnight, I shall miss her but she looks very thin and washed out and needs to go. Delhi seems to have worn off completely, it seems like a dream to me too.*

*I hope you've found somewhere to live & are happy.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: March 25. Back under the mimosa which has only a few flowers. The rubber trees are glittering with new satin leaves, Persian lilac is scenting the air, the pink bougainvillea is turning brown, the ground orchids are out, cassias are turning yellow and dangling their seed cases, the driver has a new wife, a pretty little widow. They brought me two towels, now he has 7 mouths to fill. After rain the hills have stepped right forward & are brushing against the compound.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 31st March 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a very nice, and very long letter, I hope this will catch you before you leave Essex. Your plans for a massive work on Witchcraft sound fascinating, I hope I'll be able to help, somehow feel my Mughals will taper away when I get home, one's interest is definitely stimulated by one's surroundings and away from India her history will probably become as boring to me as it is to everyone else. The clash of cultures is the aspect of it that interests me most too but it's so tremendously complex that I haven't enough lifetime left to study it in. I sent off my article to History Today but haven't much hope of it, I was really wanting to put it towards Anne's fare! It was called "Two sixteenth century passages to India" and described the arrival of Babur and Vasco da Gama,<sup>383</sup> rather facetiously perhaps and of course there was no room to follow up.*

*I know nothing about Beatrice Webb and always thought of her as a dreadfully bossy lady who overshadowed her much cleverer little husband – but I'm obviously completely wrong. There is to be a Hill University soon I'm told, for the Tribal peoples and probably situated in some salubrious and beautiful spot, so that might be an opening for you but I agree that you should probably have a diploma at least in anthropology – even if you never needed it in your actual work you can't have too many qualifications, particularly here.*

*I wish every day I knew more in that line, I went to a school the other day which is in a Naga village, a little island of Nagas in the middle of the Assamese who have retained their language and dress and culture and yet settled down to living as plains people, I would love to study them properly and not just coo about their beauty and oddness. They were very beautiful though, there was a young girl with a baby on her back, both exquisite with cascades of golden orchids dangling from their ears, the sort of thing one would get hundreds of pounds for photographing if one ever remembered ones camera. I said I would go once a week to give English lessons at the school so I hope to both photograph, paint and explore, but I know how these sort of hopes have been dashed or just faded out a hundred times before.*

*I'm starting in my own school again this morning, feeling rather jaded too after the Chairman's cocktail party last night. It was the usual affair, everyone looking as if they were having a wonderful time but in fact snarling at everyone else in corners. I'm really terribly glad we're leaving at this moment, the company is going to be run by a lot of accountants in Calcutta and everyone here treated as pawns in their nasty little games – at least that's the way it would appear. I personally think there will be a lot of labour trouble as a result, they can go on so long just thinking of themselves and the shareholders but the day of retribution can't be delayed for ever.*

*I feel the book I want to write now is a bitter, waspish Waughish satire on the whole shabby society – perhaps I will if I don't mellow in the Lake District air. That poem you quote of Housmans is one that is always haunting me too, especially when I feel homesick, that and "For I have promises to keep" and de la Mares "There is a wind where the rose was" seem much sadder than a lot of better poems and full of one's sense of waste and loss – though exactly what it is one has lost is hard to define.*

*I think you are right in saying that poetry is good for history, I'm sure it makes one aware of the wind that is blowing through the facts which is so much more important than the facts themselves. That is a terrible metaphor or rather simile, no metaphor – you can see how muddled my thinking is this morning – I wish I hadn't got this class on. It's just tiredness, I was quite sober and we left early but I couldn't sleep for thinking about all those terrible people.*

*We spent the day with the Lobbans and it ended with a terrible row and I don't suppose we shall see them again, I'm such a bad Buddhist, I should just disassociate myself and not let people irritate me so much. I can't think how I could have imagined anyone so bigoted could have been a friend – and yet at once I sense you criticizing my own superiority and I can see it too, I do think myself superior to people like that and there are an awful lot of them here, the only way to cope is to be like Verrier Elwyn, just gently humorous – only it's very difficult! We both feel we shall be stepping into a saner world soon, but I suppose you meet that sort of tiny-mindedness everywhere.*

*Oxford must be beautiful this month, I hope you will have some walks by the river and not feel the sadness of the lost springs of your life. Here the brainfever bird has started to call to brighten our nights.*

*With much love from us both - Mummy*

Notebook: April 1st. "You're ill" sings in the morning, the leechu trees are honey-washed & moaning with bees, the first mushrooms are appearing, the waxy gold orchid is out, the rains trees are lifting pale fingers to the sun.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 6th April 1965

*My dear Alan*

*Thank you for a letter describing your hunger strike outside Keats's house, it sounded romantic though in fact was probably awfully uncomfortable. I hope it wasn't because you were completely out of cash – you didn't say what the strike was about? It sounds so lovely at home, but the last April I shall miss my springs seem such a very little store but I shall enjoy them all the more I expect because of it. Here the simul cotton trees have started firing their seed bullets at the tin roof of the bungalow, they then explode with a puff of white cotton (very kind of them, thus enabling me to complete my metaphor!). A thousand little copper beetles are champing away at my new shrubs, I got some spray for them yesterday but my Buddhist instincts got the better of me, they look so happy and pretty.*

*Last Friday my favourite pupil took me to his house to watch sugar cane being made, it was quite interesting, a bullock (blindfolded) plodded round and round a press into which the sticks of cane were put to have the juice extracted. This was dark green and very sickly, and was poured into an enormous flat pan over a huge fire in a hole in the ground. The juice boiled in this for about three quarters of an hour, turning golden and bubbling and jumping like little fishes, while they patted it with bamboo scoops. Suddenly they knew it was ready and took it off and continued to thump and slap at it with other flat sort of flap-like bamboo tools, until the dark brown syrup and the golden froth combined into a thick smooth substance like wet sand. This they poured into earthenware pots and gave me one, its molasses and very sweet and delicious. There is something satisfying about watching people doing traditional chores, and the wood ash and hot syrup smelt very good. This particular family are most attractive and Biren the boy is my brightest pupil and worth bothering about, but I don't quite know what I can do for him, there are no jobs here.*

*Sir Owain has left leaving a deep sense of gloom behind him, everyone thought things were going to be better under the new regime but it seems not, it's all going to be so beastly efficient and impersonal it makes me shiver. I just hope the coolies and staff will kick, but they are so dreadfully resigned, it's one of the saddest things about India how much the poor will take, a sort of hopeless acceptance that makes one want to scream. It's part of their religion too, and the biggest obstacle in the way of family planning, God knows best is their answer to everything but sadly He doesn't seem to, and they will go on trusting. But perhaps their simple trust makes their lives worthwhile in a way that we have forgotten.*

*We went up to Digboi on Sunday with the Finneys, four hours each way but it wasn't too tiring really and I was glad to see it after all these years. Had intended to see the parents of Anne's friend in London but of course Daddy wouldn't let me so we just shopped, drank beer and had a vast Chinese Meal. Digboi is a strange outcrop of little hills on the plain with the houses built on them, with pine trees and twisting roads, very un-Indian and attractive in a way.*

*Brenda is off on Friday, she may turn up in Oxford as there is a chance of her going for an examination there. She wants to get a teaching job for a month or two until John comes home, then he hopes to get a PhD if he can get a grant. I think Brenda would like to get one too but will probably have to earn to keep them going. I shall miss her a lot but have a terribly intense programme mapped out – teaching, Mughals and preparing another childrens book. The mapping is all that has happened so far!*

*I think I'll have to write you a joint letter in future, letter writing seems to take up so much of my time. I got a reply from Peter Quennell almost by return of post saying that the other editor was away but he would let me know about my article when he had discussed it with him – it doesn't sound too hopeful but I must say they are very polite and nice in that place, quite different from most editors one knows.*

*I'm re-reading Tawney and feel so small, ignorant and incoherent by comparison, his knowledge and the strong, supple and moving prose in which he expresses it astonishes me at every sentence. I've had no reply from anyone I wrote to for books or information, the only two people who have answered are those English profs you put me onto, typical I'm afraid. The gramophone arrived for Fiona apparently, thank you so much, I will send you a cheque for 1st instalment in my next.*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Notebook: April 16th. A sodden world, the hills fuzzed with cloud, wet brick, the hiss of the mali's brush as he sweeps up soggy rubber leaves, butterflies transparent with damp. Yesterday I took Manik's wife to buy a loom & had cold sweet watery milk in her relations house.*

They were being visited by the Chief Minister & given Rs 500 as compensation for the uncle who got killed when the roof fell on him in the bazaar.

They were all miserable but excited by the fuss, and I felt unable to cope as I chewed aniseed & made silly ungrammatical remarks. Later met another of her relations & was taken to his house which was a smart little bungalow with modern hideous zebra chairs in steel, photograph albums neatly stacked with pictures of gentlemen in light suits with "His memory is ever green" under them, mock sea shells & glass animals and a huge expensive wireless. Sat studying each shell minutely for hours & then had tea – lovely meat-balls, coconut ice & gram, and some rather painful conversation. Odd to be having tea with the Courtenay's<sup>384</sup> paniwalla but not as odd as I thought. Always feel stimulated & saddened by these voyages into another world.

I went to watch sugar cane being made the other day – a press round which plodded a blindfolded bullock to extract the dark green juice, which was poured into a vast iron skillet on a fire in a large clay-lined hole in the ground. Bamboos were thrust under it & the syrup quite soon brought to a simmer & then to a rattling boil, jumping like little fishes, while a man slapped at it with a bamboo tennis racket. Suddenly it was ready & was taken off the fire, when it was yellow scum on top of dark brown liquid, & the next scraping & slapping was to combine these into a golden mash, the consistency of wet sand. This was done with a triangular bamboo on the end of a pole, the golden arms moving with grace & vigour among the golden sugar, drawing the wet sweet tide forwards like a rake, then crushing & pushing it away. Bamboos popped & banged, the bullock lay among some sugar cane chewing & flicking its furry ears, I drank milk & ate spicy balls & aniseed & breathed in the smell of ash & hot sugar, & the men who had helped drank tea too out of bamboos, crouching on their haunches & sucking in sensually while the earthen pots stood round – everything right, delicious, elegant & peaceful.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 22nd April 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*I think you and Granpa will be living on porridge and poached eggs unless Granny is back – I do hope all is well and that Robert's lunch was a great success, I'm longing to hear of the impact of his book.<sup>385</sup> Granpa's description of it as a story of unimaginable horror will surely make it a best seller. Please thank him for a letter we got a few days ago, don't seem to have had one from you this week but it's probably all this moving about. Anne said you had been staying there for a night, we are swithering<sup>386</sup> a bit now about the project to get her out. It seems unlikely that we shall have our provident fund in time to pay for the passage, and also I'm wondering if a trip on a cargo boat with a lot of old fogeys like ourselves (who else would be able to afford it?) would be worth the expense and have suggested that we give her a trip later instead – perhaps with Fiona or a young party. I hope she isn't too disappointed, but she seemed to us a little disappointed at having to give up her job so soon, although you say she isn't happy in it she says she loves it.*

*All my dreams are having to be abandoned one by one – seeing Ankor Wat, doing a tour of India, having Anne out, bringing the dogs home – it now seems that we shall just climb onto the boat, finis. However I'm still hopefully planning a long train journey round Buddhist shrines on my way to Calcutta and will cling to that until the last few weeks. My photos of Delhi came the other day and were very good really, not good enough for an article on the Mughals I had planned for the Sunday Times but a beautiful reminder of some unforgettable moments. I'll be sending them home with someone soon.*

*I have at last Got Down to my book, am writing the first draft of the first section and hoping my agent will interest someone in it, there are still lots of missionary sources to be*

*consulted which I can't get here. Now I have started I want to write all day and emerge in a dream of Moghulistan which can't be very cheerful for Daddy. I am reading D.H. Lawrence and Tawney in between and my style veers from one to the other, my forte obviously would be parody as I am so quickly influenced by what I'm reading. When I stop to consider who will ever read my book I am tempted to fling it aside forthwith, but there is always the comfort of knowing you will bravely struggle through! Anyway results are beside the point, a rather nice poem of Tagores expresses what I hope to feel; "As my days pass in the crowded market of this world And my hands grow full with the daily profits, Let me ever feel that I Have gained nothing – let me not forget for a moment, Let me carry the pangs of this sorrow In my dreams And in my wakeful hours" (It looks better when printed in lines).*

*We had a wet Easter week end, the Macnees<sup>387</sup> were here for Sat and Sunday with their three delightful children but there wasn't much we could do. Charlotte's brother Toby is working at this Tibetan refugee place in Mussoorie (Ockenden Venture) and they are a nice family, she paints enthusiastically but rather badly and Jimmy is mad on the theatre, his brother is in the "Avengers" on Telly.*

*John Finney came to lunch, Brenda never got to the Ajanta caves<sup>388</sup> after all as they were too far away. Yesterday I went to see an Assamese planter who has been writing to me on and off for years and lent me books, it was a beautiful drive past flooded fields with the Naga hills reflected in them, past the turning to Tingalibam too which made me nostalgic. He turned out to be rather a pathetic old boy with runny eyes living in a broken down bungalow with poison green walls and bits of leopard skin used as doyleys on the occasional tables. However I think he was quite glad to see me and lent me a whole lot of new books, including a terrible novel on tea all about shining brown bodies and planters slobbering over them, it really is time somebody wrote some sense about us but I don't think I can be bothered. We spent the time gossiping about all the local planters, I find it difficult to have the kind of talks on history that people do in books, if I do start to talk I sound like a schoolmistress straight away.*

*He also lent me two books on witchcraft by someone called Seabrook – just tribal stuff but I'll pass on anything significant. I wonder if you have started the thesis, the difficulty is to make some sort of shape of the mass of uncoordinated facts, but with your trained mind that probably is taken care of. It still continues quite cool and breezy, I expect to hear some lyrical descriptions of spring from you from Lakeland, though it sounds as if it's been pretty wet.*

*Lunch time, I'm sorry for a dull letter but I seem to be slightly dazed though I have no illnesses to report, in fact am heavier than I've been for about 20 years, probably middle aged spread actually.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 29th April 1965*

*My dear Alan,*

*My letters seem to have been missing you but I hope this will catch you safely. You didn't sound as if you enjoyed the Lakes as much as usual, perhaps being away from the people and atmosphere of Oxford is what you miss. From what you say about cavernous great coffee bars the sooner we get that croft in the outer isles the better. Why don't you all go croft hunting this summer, we could pay for one in the spring of next year in time for you to retire to for your thesis. If only someone could drive there is the car waiting to be trundled round the highlands, I'm sure you could pass a test with a few lessons.*

*Here it is suddenly hot with the attendant irritations of flies and mosquitoes and sores on the dogs and their meat going bad, the heat horrifies me these days and I would go to the hills for a month if it wasn't so miserable for Daddy to be left.*

*The Pakistan border situation isn't making us feel any happier, I just can't bear to think what would happen if it turned into civil war with all the minority communities being turned on and refugees pouring over every border – but I don't think either of them will really allow that to happen. I can't think what Pakistan is aiming at, a ruse with China to wreck India's already wobbly economy I suppose.*

*We had a rather boring week end with the Rosses, boring for me anyway as they all trudged endlessly round golf courses and I had nothing but "Housewife" to read. They are just off on leave and taking my Delhi snaps which I've asked Anne to pass on to you – they might be good enough for an article for the English Geographical which I was reading in the Rosses bungalow and whose standard is not high. The text is particularly weak and I can think of a million subjects for them.*

*I'm ploughing on with my book, it's hard for the light touch I intend not to slip over into facetiousness, it won't be history at all in the way you mean the word, no juggling of cards to find new meanings and connections, just a story to be told. I aim at a modest 1000 words a day but can't always manage it when I have to go out.*

*On Monday I went to open a new school, the meeting only lasted 4 and a half hours but then the minister who was chief speaker found his clutch plate had gone and we had to send my jeep to search for another. We repaired to a village house which belonged to his maternal uncles brother and ate puffed rice and all the locals came in to tell him about the shocking behaviour of the local headmaster who played cards all through lessons when he wasn't drinking. By the end of all that it was beginning to get dark and no sign of the jeep, so we stood by the side of the road while the stars came out and the minister said "To put it in a nut we are stranded" – I was frantic at what Daddy must be thinking as he was expecting me back by six and it was then nearly eight! In the end the jeep turned up with the clutch plate, I took the minister and his wife to the station to catch a train which was waiting for them to step into and got home to find Daddy drinking beer and quite calm.*

*The minister said that if I planned a course of English readers for Assamese children he would see that it became the standard text book and I would make plenty of money – so now I have started to turn that idea over in my head. Family planning is going to be made much easier with a breakthrough in contraceptives which I think will at last be the answer for India.*

*Oh by the way, the minister is sitting for his M.A. in June, his subject is English Lit. with the usual poets, the Romantics and the Elizabethans, and also Victorian literature with an accent on education. If you already have any paper backs on these you could buzz out he would be very grateful but don't buy any as they will probably arrive too late in any case.*

*I got my first book from the Nat. Library yesterday, after three months trying, I'm getting to the stage now where I know everything – well of course not everything, but the surface information most of these books present.*

*I can't quite make out if you have finished with Essex for good and will now be settled in Park Town? Of course I will pay Granny for your keep, to be quite honest I always do, perhaps she gets it twice over?! We can't enter into the buying of a house for them at this stage but could contribute a bit towards the rent, I really must write to Richard about it all. What are his plans as a writer, is he embarking on a book? Brenda Finney has a flat in Wimbledon, I'll get the address and you might go and see her if in London.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 5th May 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter from Oxford, where you must be glad to be back with a bit of space and your books again – I wonder where Granny put all those divans she bought, in your room probably! I haven't heard from her since her trip south which is rather surprising, I expect her version of the reception given to Gallipoli will be more dramatic than yours – but I hope it will sell well. One always gets the impression that Robert's scholarship is rather superficial but perhaps that's because he carries it lightly. The more I write on my subject the more I realise the limit of my poor little knowledge, the adjective I can see applied to my book in imaginary criticisms is "trivial" – which it is. I have at last got one of my books from Calcutta, "India" by Percival Spear who is one of the acknowledged specialists – it is very fair, straightforward – and dull, because the writing is so pedestrian, not to say repetitive. I wonder how important the words actually are in the writing of history? Indian history is so dramatic and full of such amazing people that to offer it to the public as a tame chronicle of events nicely balanced but sepia coloured throughout seems a pity. Better to be bitter and sometimes wrong like Trevor Roper surely.*

*Anyway I'm tapping on with my own bitter offering and have got about half way through the first section and enjoying it very much now I've really got started. I even dream Mughals at night so it must have seeped right into my subconscious. It's certainly a wonderful way of passing time, the days go whirling past and I'm practically unconscious of what is going on elsewhere – though thank goodness the border situation seems to be better.*

*Liz Leethams parents are coming back as comptrollers of John Freemans<sup>389</sup> household, I'm terribly jealous but can't imagine myself comptrolling anything if in Delhi, I would be head down in archives all day. They get £1400 a year tax free, and free board and lodging – a little excessive one would think but everything is out here.*

*By the way before I forget, I got a letter from Blackwell and my debit of 13/9 had turned to a credit of 5/- is this your doing? Thank you very much if it is, Ian says he has returned the book but I just don't know with him what to believe. I will send a cheque towards the H.P. in my next, do say if you are running into financial difficulties at all.*

*After a lot of thrashing about we have decided not to bring Anne out, she herself seems quite happy about this and says she would prefer to go elsewhere next year and really I think she's right. She appears to have her first Steady, an Alan who writes books and is very lonely but apart from that I don't know what he does. One can't question her but Fiona says she is very self-assured and well-adjusted these days.*

*I haven't really anything to offer in the way of news, it rains and rains, two inches again last night and still very cool but I fear floods if this goes on. I started teaching at another school yesterday, in the Naga village I told you about, a girls school and much more orderly and spacious than this one and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It is very depressing to see my boys of last year all drifting about without jobs "wandering hither and thither like a vagabond" as one of them expressed it to me. Daddy has taken on one of them as a learner but they keep leaping out of doorways at me asking me to please find them work before I go to London and I feel sick with the hopelessness of it all.*

*My school master, who taught me Assamese, is being accused of molesting one of the children – pure maliciousness but as he says it has placed a spot on his spotless life and is very depressed about it. I wonder if it will be a relief to be free of all these problems about which one can do nothing, or whether there will be just as many at home.*

*Brenda has a job as a supply teacher and is earning £3-10 a day and has a flat in Wimbledon, she says she will be coming to see you one of these week ends.*



*Can't think of any more news, I haven't been out all week but have a houseful of people coming up for the week-end which is rather a horrid thought, I hate being shaken out of my routine and find it so difficult to get back again.*

*Daddy is fairly busy now that his factory has started, but the cold wet weather is holding up the tea so there isn't much to make.*

*We are all waiting breathlessly for Simpsons departure in a month's time, it will be like taking out a nagging tooth to most people though his sycophants will miss him. Rosemary writes cheerfully from Shillong, I haven't told her we're going yet but will try to get her settled into some training before I leave.*

*Much love from us both - Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 12th May 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, I was very impressed with your lecturing the Balliol history society, was Christopher Hill there? I do hope it goes off well. I had a long letter describing Grannys grand tour but haven't seen any reviews of Roberts book yet. Granny said there was a hopeful house in Crowborough but Richard didn't know if he could afford it though I should have thought a building society would have done most of the paying to start with. I would like to see them settled before the winter. Granny mentioned having lost that green blanket, thin thing, it should be with you because we brought it down when we last came and left it by mistake. I'll replace it if it has disappeared though.*

*I have churned out the first section of my book, I can't think how I could have written 20,000 odd words so quickly, it must be very bad but I shall send it home to my agent anyway. I was cheered by getting a letter from "History Today" saying they will take my article, Alan Hodge wrote this time and said it was excellent and that both of them had greatly enjoyed reading it. I must say they are charming people, even if somewhat vague – they say it will come out in the autumn but perhaps they mean next. It will nearly pay my train fare to Delhi which eases my conscience. I'm reading "Louis XIVth" by Vincent Cronin which is much boosted and a book society choice but I can't think why, it is very feebly written, Tawney has spoilt me I'm afraid and E.M. Forster who I'm reading for about the tenth time.*

*We had Peter Sehmer for the day on Sunday and I went to the service, a new padre and jolly, he is a keen mountaineer I believe; his sermon on the problem of suffering was not very inspired, in a country like India to have cliches about God's good time delivered in bright tones is irritating. Still one has to admit that it is Christians who do most about Indias suffering, even if they have odd ideas about its use. The break through in contraception isn't a pill, its called an intrauterine device and is fitted permanently by a doctor and removed when a child is wanted. The pill doesn't really suit the coolie mentality, one would have to hand them out daily and see them swallowed.*

*I haven't been down to the hospital for a week or two, I seemed to have a bad effect, in fact if I was superstitious or witch minded I would wonder if I had the evil eye what with those three scholars I wrote to dying and the mali I was painting. I havent dared to ask any of the other servants to sit for me.*

*Sunday turned out to be an exhausting day of sitting at the club for hours after the service and lunch at half past three and neither of us could sleep after it so Monday was a wash out too, like you I loathe being shaken out of my routine. The club is so boring it isnt true, I seem to be talking a different language to everyone else and my eyes constantly swimming as I suppress my yawns. The accountants are up from Calcutta to take over the office and much*

*buzzing about and rumours which dont worry us at all except its sad that all those clerks will be out of work.*

*Thank you very much for sending the books for the minister and the one for me too, please count these as my birthday present. I read a review of "The crisis of India" <sup>390</sup>in which he is said to advocate a form of communism, certainly one feels that anything would be better than the terrible resignation with which most of the people accept their hopeless lot, as Xavier said "I never cease wondering at the number of new inflections which, in addition to all the usual forms, have been added in this language to the ill-omened verb "to rob". The latest from here is the surrounding and imprisoning of the Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, Dr Taylor,<sup>391</sup> for six hours because he wouldn't alter the date of the M.A. examination! You see what you would have to cope with if you came here, he is a missionary type who has done an enormous amount for the university but has naturally resigned – and this is the the cream of Assamese society. I will never cease wondering what went wrong with India and whose fault it was, one of the questions I try to answer in my book but cannot.*

*Have you started to write your thesis yet? I wonder if you found the answer to any of the questions you were asking. Such a lovely breezy day to-day and the rubber trees glinting and hissing like green seas.*

*Much love – Mummy*

Notebook: May 14th. Another month – mostly wet & cool with cotton flying & birds' friends to visit him in the early morning & walks with the dogs through tea pearled with dew, the green buds bitter, my shoes slippery with blood from leeches, the hills like furry bests that have rolled & have white fluff still sticking to them. Guinean pig grass & breakfast & brown sugar for Miranda who is like molasses herself in her new coat, very beautiful & shiny like a chestnut.

One day I went to see Mr Barua, the historian. Drove through a flooded countryside, beautiful with the hills sapphire blue & each house and bamboo & duck repeated in water. His house had bilious green walls with old photographs of planters on them, blotching & pale with age, and a moth-eaten black leopard skin, & on the tables more leopard cut into rounds as doyleys. The chairs were dark puce with scarlet cushions.

He was older than I thought & we talked of his friends & his fat, plain, speechless wife gave us tea – not a very inspiring afternoon, both of us disappointed I think. His eyes dripped at the corners & his library consisted mostly of Moravia & Henry Miller.

Another day I went to open a new school near a tank, ducks sailed past the windows as if drawn on strings. A Minister was there in an orange silk shirt, & his pretty little wife, he talked for 45 mins, and then the H.M's brother read his speech for another half hour, his teeth very uncontrolled & having to be sucked back out of the microphone. "He is very expert at extracurricular activities" the minister explained. "Scoutings & guidings & such-like".

Afterwards we drank tea & two little girls did a Naga dance for us & then it was discovered that the ministers clutch plate had gone. Our jeep was sent to Nazira & we retired to the house of the ministers maternal uncle's brother which happened to be next door, a typical middle-class home he told me, very big and dark with bamboo squares in the rafters for sitting on but chairs for us, & more tea and rice & curds & a present of towels.

A deputation to the minister explained that the M.E. section headmaster spent his time gambling & drinking & never attended school – they all stood round inviting him & the Minister listened very politely & it grew dark & still no clutch plate. Finally we all trooped out & stood by the roadside, hoping our anxious glances would somehow drag the jeep back. The stars came out & "In a nut we are stranded" said the Minister. "Assamese are irresponsible people". He is studying for his M.A. & was full of quotations from Pope to fit each occasion, a charming minister.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 21st May 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this is a couple of days late, I got in a muddle and then couldn't get any forms. A dark wet morning, I've been for a walk with the dogs and picked off a dozen leeches and now its pouring steadily, I fear the most awful floods this year and I also fear that nothing is being prepared for them.*

*This cyclone in Pakistan is ghastly, it seems to happen so often and nobody ever seems to give warning, perhaps it will take Ayub Khans mind off invasion but the cost is rather high.<sup>392</sup> The world seems in a more than usual muddle at the moment but one goes on hammering at ones typewriter and hoping for the best. I am getting through my work and think I will be finished in time to send it home with John Finney in about ten days' time and then will have to wait till I can get to another library again which won't be till I get home I suppose.*

*It would be an excellent thing if Robert bought a house in Oxford for us to lodge in, I had a letter from Richard though saying he was definitely going to buy G & G a house so had better leave it to them to work out. I haven't seen a sign of Gallipoli but only see the Telegraph and I expect a sheaf of press cutting are on their way out. Richard said he thought Robert rather went out of his way to show up Morehead<sup>393</sup> but otherwise it was very good.*

*I wish I could help over Zoe but apart from keeping my eyes open for anyone wanting help on the voyage can't really suggest anything either, it's not really the right time of year for voyages and anyway I do wonder if she has the faintest idea of what trying to live in India on a shoestring with the hot weather to cope with as well would be like? There is nothing except a YWCA offering possible accommodation and they're usually booked up, I feel she would be better advised to wait until she could get a job and stay longer. I know she probably feels she could rough it but in an Indian city that would mean dysentery or worse.*

*Very little news as usual, I have been writing a bit and teaching a bit and walking through the sopping leech-ridden tea and haven't seen anyone. This routine suits me fine but makes it very hard to write letters. John Finney actually came out one morning, Brenda is finding teaching in Clapham quite terrible, the children are mostly coloured and there is absolutely no discipline, ink bottles flying and an uproar all the time. Sad. They all come from bad homes or brothels and quite a few of them already have V.D. it makes Assam sound like a paradise with all its problems. John has applied for various jobs with big firms, he wants to get a D.Sc. by writing papers which is apparently the best thing you can do in his line.*

*There was a meeting in Nazira the other day in which it was explained that the Managers are now being allowed to run their gardens again, for the last four years everything has been done through Simpson. Things should be a lot easier for Daddy but we haven't got much time to enjoy it.*

*We are picturing arriving in mid Jan with Granny having removed all the carpets and beds, luckily theres your sleeping bag which we shall have to crawl into in turn.*

*One of Fiona's tutors wants to borrow the car so I suppose thats all right, Anne says she has completely lost her nerve and is unable to face the thought of another test. She sounds to be having a riotous time but I think exaggerates a little, I hope so! She wants to go to Mexico next year so I hope I make some money out of my book.*

*I have a wearing day ahead with teaching this morning and a prize giving this afternoon, thank you very much for sending my minister a book, he will be thrilled and I'm sure will be a better minister as an M.A.*

*Gauhati University seems to be in a mess and has been closed down as all they do is throw bricks about, a general symptom of the frustration the young feel at their futures I think.*

*Sorry for such an empty letter -  
Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: May 24th. Hot sun again and a din of crickets, & my tummy churning & my conscience nagging because I didn't go to Nagagaun - yesterday it was teeming & I had to go to Muttrapore<sup>394</sup> sports prize giving. I gave out a million little cups & shabby little books but was amused by the stern Master who was running the show, & by some Buddhist priests in the audience, their skin almost as gold as their robes, their smiles flooding their faces, their arms & legs & eyes still.

Afterwards we had tea together, they wouldn't eat the coconut ice as they only have one meal, & talked politely & then I drove them back to save them a seven mile walk which they had placidly contemplated as the last bus had gone. They got out into an evening brilliant green & gold, the flooded rice fields reflecting the setting sun & stood in their saffron robes with their quiet arms to their sides & smiled & walked off to their muddy little village & their begging bowls – & I had a great desire to go with them into their green and gold nirvana, to the uncluttered centre of peace they had found.

Instead I drove back through the blazing dusk with one of the schoolmasters who had black lines under his eyes & said they would have sweet memories of me forever.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 28th May 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*I am thrilled at the thought of having T. Ropers autograph, I am a great fan, I don't know enough to criticize the content of his work but his style is sooper – though I can hardly believe he really glowed at the thought of having a distant middle aged planters wife as his disciple! The proof of my article has come and gone, very quick so maybe they will publish it soon and I shall get the money.*

*It is boiling here and has been for the last five days, the temperature at 94 and frightfully humid, I go for my morning walk at 6 but it's almost too hot even then. Horrid, but a good thing from the point of view of the flood situation. I see some new flood control device has been used successfully for the first time in the world on one of our rivers, so perhaps that is the beginning of the solution.*

*When one wipes the sweat from one's eyes and looks round it is to be dazzled by the beauty of the flowering trees which are a riot of scarlet and gold, and all the villages are floating in pools of pale purple water hyacinths. Seeing it all for the last time is breaking my heart, but I think I keep the sneaking hope that it won't be the last time, that I shall make masses of money out of my book and somebody will give me a vast great research grant to come back to India. This in fact would be impossible unless I learnt Persian – actually I have been thinking quite seriously of trying to do this – I wonder how difficult it is. I am more and more coming round to your idea that history is written in crop statistics and legal records and revenue assessments and not in travellers' tales or junketings at court, though it's a good deal easier in India to discover how people lived and what they thought about because they're living and thinking to a large extent in the same way now.*

*We have been out several times this week, to the club on Monday to see a bad film of Doris Days, to the Pooles to dinner on Tuesday to chew our way through a huge hot meal, to Jorhat on Thursday to try and square up a school problem that has been outstanding for six years – and still is! And to a wedding in a village yesterday evening, one of my schoolboys sisters. It was very interesting as the priest was one of the old Ahom brand speaking the Tai language, which I thought was dead. It was pretty, with 101 little lights, the nearly naked priest chanting his Tai and throwing rice over the lights, the bride in white silk and the*

*groom with marigolds round his neck and the row of village elders all shouting instructions and advice through the ceremony.*

*After the bride had been presented to us and given us aniseed to chew and drifted off her uncle said "There is one important matter sir. She has not passed urine whole day". So we had to thrash out that little problem while we ate our wedding meal – they really are wonderful. The uncle spent the evening telling us about his Guru who lives in Bihar and has disciples of every race and religion and is generally conceded by them to be the reincarnation of Christ, Mahommed, Buddha and Krishna. He thought of relativity long before Einstein and after a week's instruction in English wrote 7 volumes. I think I must go and see him, oh yes, and when a world famous wrestler visited him he couldn't bend back his little finger.*

*We have been invited to meet John Freeman at a "do" in Jorhat so that will be a thrill. Don't worry about the blanket, it'll be somewhere.*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 7th June 1965*

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm afraid this may be late, I've lost track rather but am now back to my Monday letter and should be able to remember. There has been a correspondence in the Telegraph about witchcraft, have been daily expecting you to appear, I missed the original article by Robert Graves which started it in which he apparently put forward the theory of it being an ancient cult – and was shot down by a lady called Rosemary Harris<sup>395</sup> and someone else.*

*I know how you feel about knowing less and less, can you imagine how little you're going to know when you're my age?! Just about everything I put on paper is a generalisation that could be immediately contradicted, Indian history is particularly evasive as the British found to their cost when they tried to pin down the land revenue system, they sent questionnaires round and found that the land belonged to the king and also to the peasant and in a sense to the landlords and yet to neither and still most definitely to all. This flexibility was of course the strength of the indigenous system but maddened the earnest improvers and they busily set about straightening and destroying, how sad that anthropology was still a closed subject then.*

*I shall love to help with your archdeaconry records, I am longing to get to original sources, I am sick of other people's interpretations of facts, particularly as they differ so widely and one just has to pick the one that suits one's own theories. It would be interesting to compare the village life of India and England in the 17th century and might help with answering the eternal question of what went wrong here.*

*We are invited to meet John Freeman at a free for all on Friday, he is touring Assam and will give us a little waffle I expect, I don't know if we can go though as there's this cultural show on. I would like to meet him though there wouldn't be time for more than an exchange of formalities I suppose.*

*There is very little news as usual, we went to my headmaster's wedding on Friday which was the usual happy confusion, hundreds of people just drifting about and apparently enjoying it, they take their pleasures without any sense of strain or any feeling that the guests must be entertained, sitting under a grubby tarpaulin being chewed by mosquitoes is apparently a perfectly good evening to offer. We of course were taken into the bridal suite and fed rice pudding and peanuts and were a nuisance to everyone until we removed ourselves, the headmaster's mother is blind from cataracts and sat looking sad in a deckchair, no wonder he can never be at school with her and his deceased brother's family to look after. The matric results come out to-day, so many futures decided, including*

*Rosemary's. I plan to go up for a few days in August to find out what she is doing with herself.*

*What you say about schools being more important than pictures is true – but what are schools for except to teach us to enjoy pictures and such? It is very difficult to get ones priorities right, I get maddened here by all the money that is apparently “wasted” on cultural shows and literary symposiums and such and yet the spirit must be fed as much as the body – and think how poor India would be without the Taj and Europe without its wonderful wasteful cathedrals built from the money that should have kept people from starving. Beauty may not be truth – is anything truth? – but it is essential surely – what does seem wrong is that such huge sums should be able to circulate among a small section of the community for their private enjoyment and snobbery.*

*It's still very beautiful here anyway, and for free – the trees are putting on the best array for years for us, which is kind but sad too. We have taken quite a few photos and hope to take more when Robert Higham brings back the lens of the camera. He comes in about ten days to everyones relief<sup>86</sup>, Nazira is a dreary place with all those people out of jobs and looking stunned.*

*Haven't heard from Granny for a long time, I hope all is well. I hope I'll have a more interesting lot of news next week, the book I sent home was the first section of my Mughals, the introductory fifty pages with a synopsis of the rest, I'm now about to embark on another childrens book which I will probably write up on the boat.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Notekook: June 11th. A hotter sun, and a heavy blanket of wet air draped round one, forcing its furry pressure against the back of the knees & the neck. More pains in the stomach, a sort of ball of sting under the ribs that rolls a bit but refuses to unwind in spite of endless prodding & long sleepless nights.

Beautiful scented trees bending pink branches over the hedge, and a golden halo round the fir trees where the laburnum is burning its swinging lamps of light. Miranda, stepping jerkily across the lawn, graceful but slightly menacing to me. Parrots in screaming crescents, egrets with orange necks driven from the rice fields, hills grey with exhaustion, almost panting, flat-washed.

This morning I set off for my Naga village feeling tired & a bit ill, cows & men were still stumping across the fields, my 2 handsome masters were waiting for me under a tree and we went to the Naga church – a tin roofed building, full of cobwebs & ashes of last winter's fires – a drum made from a tree- trunk, carved, a totem pole with a naked man standing above an elephants head, another totem pole with a tiger lying down it, birds & other little men swinging on strings.

The Nagas gathered round, the children exceptionally dirty & with sores & running noses, the women mostly elderly with shapeless figures & black teeth & huge rings of gold in their sagging ears. Not very attractive but the village was sunny except for a mass of howling dogs that followed us everywhere.

Afterwards I went to my headmasters house & drank very sweet tea in enormous heat while trying to sympathise in Assamese with his aged uncles kidney trouble. The poor old man was obviously ill & uncomfortable & his days must be cheerless & long. Back to my cheerful girls but I was so hot & tired I could hardly raise any energy.

We have been to two weddings – Biren's sister's which was fun – she was very pale & had little circles of white flowers painted on her cheeks & forehead. There were 101 little lamps, and an almost naked Ahom priest chanting in Tai & throwing rice on them & a row of noisy old men sitting cross-legged & shouting stage directions and the Go-down Babu to bring us down to earth with the information that the bride hadn't passed urine whole day!

My headmaster's wedding was more sophisticated & duller, he moving in circles where men have first classes & wear long pants & we sat in a hot little room talking to them about tea. His mother is blind from cataracts & lay in a deck chair, her thin arms dry with fever, hoping I suppose for some cheer from her daughter in law.

As usual all the other guests were offered were benches, mosquitoes & presumably tea – and this they were accepting with a great deal of pleasure. My stomach was uncomfortable, I must take the dogs into the burning afternoon, past the frayed cannas, down the hill to the bridge & the smell of excreta, past the dhobi house, the chota bungalow which is deep in leeches stones & small boys, & into the tea where there is a little shade & the warm smell of the leaves.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, June 15th 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, and also for a parcel of books which has just arrived, the English course and the Cowper Powys<sup>397</sup>. All very welcome, I'm going to hie up to Shillong and show the minister of education the course and try to persuade them to adopt it, or something similar. I haven't yet started "Wolf Solent". I like to gloat over a new book for a week or two – you must let us help you with your Blackwells bill when you finally have to face the day of reckoning as you have spent an awful lot on me. I have read one of the Mughal books you mentioned and the other two sound as if they are along the usual lines, so I won't bother with them. I am more concerned with the European aspects of the period now, as the two are supposed to run parallel through the book until they finally collide. (Can aspects collide, this is the sort of sentence I'm forever struggling with, but I'm glad to note that other authors have the same trouble and don't bother to cope with it).*

*I don't know what to suggest about your future because I'm not quite in the picture, if you have finished your research and still have another years grant couldn't you use it for your social anthropology course instead, and then you could write up your thesis next winter. Anyway your tutors will be able to advise you better, I do think anthropology would be an asset for the sort of work you hope to find, I saw an advertisement for work among the bushmen which would have suited you but it demanded anthropology – and out here the more qualifications the better. Verrier Elwin of course underlays the terrible loneliness one must feel living for years amongst a simple alien people, however attractive, and he was a saint anyway – but possibly you are too? An embryo one?*

*It hasn't been a very nice week for me as I've been suffering from tummy trouble and it's been very hot and the combination depressing, specially as the tummy kept me awake at night. However I'm much better to-day and able to face problems again. On Friday I went to visit the Naga village where my school is, there is a funny little "church" full of totem poles (or perhaps phallic pillars) carved with tigers and elephants and little men and a huge drum made out of the trunk of a tree also carved. The Nagas themselves were rather seedy, the children covered with sores and all running at the nose, not at all healthy and handsome like the hill ones. Still they are always attractive and I hope to go back and photograph, they were a little suspicious and shy this time and I will have to take some softening sweetmeats with me. It would be interesting to study the structure of their society but the language problem would be too much for me, my Assamese is so superficial. Afterwards I went and had tea in my headmasters house, he is a charming young man, 25 years old (age has nothing to do with being the head of a school here, its simply a question of having a degree and knowing the right people) and on Sunday he and the second master who is supposedly handsome came to see me here. It was a frightfully hot day and Daddy wasn't enthusiastic at*



*having to entertain them but they didnt stay long and went off clutching the Bible and some plants for their gardens, fairly content.*

*On Sunday evening I dragged Daddy to a "cultural show" in Sibsagar, it was another fiery evening and the hall very crowded and Daddy more than a little restless, however he sat out half the programme with not too pained an expression. It was mostly Assamese songs but there was also a violin recital, the first time I've hear Indian music played on the violin and I rather liked it after getting tuned in, they play all jerky and staccato to an accompaniment on a drum. The only snag was the teddy boys who had not been able to afford tickets spent the evening hurling huge stones at the roof, so it was punctuated by the shattering crashes of rock on tin, typically it was only us two who jumped out of our seats, nobody else seemed to notice, and a mynah sat on the beam above the artists heads preening its feathers placidly through the whole performance. This amiable acceptance of whatever comes along is one of the most endearing of the Assamese traits – but I suppose a deadly obstacle in the way of progress too.*

*We had two and a half inches of rain on Sunday night and the colours next morning were dazzling so we took the camera out and photographed birds on the flooded fields.*

*They finally paid my poor little clerk Rs400 back which was something.*

*Much love, Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 20th June 1965*

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for a letter, perhaps your last from Oxford. I do hope you have managed to heave your books and files home somehow, aren't you going to have any holiday. Of course we would be delighted for you to make your base at Field Head, we have almost decided to fly home after all and be back for Christmas. None of the cargo boats seem to call at S. Indian ports which is the chief point of going in one, and Daddy is dying to have Christmas at home, not having experienced the delights of piles of greasy dishes stretching from the Queens speech till the Telly Panto! I hope they will give us our ten days local leave, which I will spend pottering round India looking at caves, and we'll then meet in Bombay.*

*You will have had your chat with Evans Pritchard by now and know whether you will be given a grant for your diploma course, if not don't bother too much, with a year's full pay, our provident fund and the profits from my book (?) I think we should be able to manage to see you through a year in Oxford without too much difficulty even if you don't get a grant. The trouble is we shan't be able to until after we come home which means you can't start this September as you probably would like to. I honestly think you would be better to do your diploma in England, the standard is much higher, and though I know Gauhati University has a department of anthropology I doubt if they know as much about it as you do already. I veer between wanting you to come out here and do some of the things I've left undone – studying the folklore and history properly and perhaps giving a hand with education – and hating the thought of the loneliness, frustration and pain you would experience. I don't think you have any idea of the suffering you would see all the time, you would never be able to eat a thing. I don't really know what is happening in N.E.F.A. but Verrier Elwin in that letter said it was stiff with people and he would not advise going there. The new tribal university planned in Shillong would be a good idea, I'll find out about it when I go up, or there are the Tibetans. With a D.Phil. and a diploma you would have no difficulty in getting a job but would probably be poorly paid – however with a camera, Tape Recorder and your pen you would be able to make up in articles and books I'm sure. Both the Khasis and the Garos could do with systematic study – but goodness if you are lonely in the Lake District how could you*

*stand living for years in wild hills with no outside resources? Perhaps with a Good Woman by your side it would be possible.*

*Its cooler again after rain, the monsoon probably, they are planting their seed in the rice fields and I hope Robert Higham has brought the lens of the camera back so I can take pictures of the young rice. He is visiting the garden this morning and Simpson leaves at the end of the week, it seems too good to be true.*

*We had a quiet week-end, my tummy trouble has been worrying me a bit but I'm on various medicines and feeling better.*

*We went out yesterday morning for a run, and drove up a jungli path across which was the chain attached to an elephant. We drove across the chain and there was much stamping and the swaying of large trees, on the way back I was rather nervous, and as we approached there was more crashing and snorts, Daddy backed quite rapidly and out of the jungle galloped a very small elephant, much more frightened than we were, and disappeared across the road dragging his chain behind him.*

*I'm having a holiday from teaching this week as they're taking their annual exams, I went on from my Naga school to Sibsagar on Friday as the lawyer who has been sitting on the school funds for the last six years had still not coughed up a vital letter he had promised. I made him go home and find it there and then, the court is a wonderful place, there is a sort of market outside it where you can get magic spells, hair cuts, tea, or letters written by a professional, seething with fascinating people and awful spivs of lawyers dressed British style in dark suits and nearly exploding with heat. Less and less people go to court now because its so crooked and expensive so the spivs are cutting their own throats.*

*I had a picnic lunch by the tank which is always beautiful, surrounded by about 50 crows who were trying to snatch the food out of my hands. Went in to the hospital in Nazira to collect the old woman who works in my garden whose grandson is very ill there, its a depressing place as all the the really bad cases go there and the Doctor took me round saying "Her days are numbered" and "We have no hope for this child" until I was nearly sick. Any hospital would be the same and no expense or trouble is spared here.*

*I must write to Rosemary, haven't heard from her for about a month and I fear this means she failed her Matric. Usual apology for a dull letter.*

*Much love - Mummy*

*Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 29th June 1965*

*My dear Alan,*

*I was so glad to get your letter saying your plans were stabilized and that E. Pritchard thought you had a chance of being helped with your anthropology. I wonder how long your thesis will take to write, and if you have discovered any significant "patterns" from all your little coloured pins, or come to any final conclusions about witchcraft generally. I'm longing to get home and talk about it all. As you will have heard Granny is probably moving in September, could you face staying on at Field Head with Poochie<sup>398</sup>, you could put up a camp bed in the kitchen and bar yourself in at night. I'm very glad for Grannys sake she seems to have found a comfortable little house or rather Richard has, nice and close to Oxford and if she can get some bridge she should be happy, Granpa will be happy anywhere once he gets his routine established. We have definitely decided to fly home and will arrive about December 10th, havent got the details settled yet but talk of little else. If I make any money from my book maybe I'll be able to get back and see all the places I've missed, if not I shall carry a dream like picture of them about with me which is probably better.*

*Don't bother about any more Mughal books, I've shelved it till I get home, but do keep a note of anything specially good you hear of. I will write the first draft of my childrens book in*

*the next few months, I can't seem to do very much in this weather. It is a strongly recognisable mixture of "The Secret Garden" and "The Jungle Book". I got a letter from Brenda yesterday saying she had just dumped my Mughals with the agents so await their gloomy tidings.*

*Brenda is still doing market research while John hoovers the flat and waits for news of various jobs he has applied for and they both seem very happy. Do go and see them if you are ever in London for more than a night or two, 5 (a) Clement Rd, Wimbledon, they would always put you up.*

*I can't imagine Verrier Elwin being involved in "scurrilous stories", as you say he seemed a strangely innocent person, a type one meets very often out here, mostly in the robes of an ascetic admittedly with a childish unconcern about the Realities of life such as earning money and making a name. The respect accorded to voluntary poverty probably makes this possible.*

*Another hot week has slipped past, filled with rain on the roof at night, we've had one or two inches every night and the rivers are all just about to burst their banks.*

*I went up to Jorhat on Thursday to try and finally settle the six-year old case of the school money, it took the Assistant Inspector of Schools precisely five minutes to give the approval we have been waiting for, but another hour and a half for his typist to produce the paragraph for him to sign. During that time he and I and various earnest spectacled ladies discussed what was wrong with the education of Assam, only one quarter of the candidates entering for Matric passed, we all knew that it was the teaching that was at fault but could only offer platitudes on how to improve this. I said I thought a cadre of really good teachers imported from outside and spread around to show the others how would be a good idea, but the Inspector said sadly that it had been tried and the good teachers simply reverted. I promised to go up and give a talk on how to improve teaching methods, its a pity I haven't had any training myself and don't know a bit more about it.*

*Jack Simpson left on Saturday and most of Nazira club was celebrating at Sonari that evening, but now there is a distinctly flat feeling in the air – we are going to miss not having anyone to hate.*

*I am deep in "Wolf Solent" at the moment, I wonder if you have read it, very Hardyish, full of dark incestuous crimes and unexplained relationships and deaths – the descriptive writing is beautiful – I love it. It's so nice to have a really long, lingering book that one can get right up to the neck in, and yet not tedious like those American novels. I still haven't seen a single review of Gallipoli, how is it going, do you know? I am going to see an Assamese historian friend this afternoon and will sound him out about the chances of a European being able to do research or other work in NEFA – it needs someone there quickly as progress is engulfing the tribes and they will soon be wearing twinkle Terylene and decorating their houses with plastic flowers like so many of the Assamese do.*

*Do find out from Fiona about the film from the camera we left with her, dying to know if those memorable moments after you got your degree are safe for posterity, I asked her but don't reckon much on the chances of getting an answer.*

*Much love, Mummy*

Notebook: July 2nd. My last June in India over & a miserable one, the shrieking parrots wheeling in dazzling formations between the shade-trees, the cassias heavenly, rainbows framing electric green against indigo hills, Birds friends above his head, the scent of rain-washed tuber roses, the first moonflowers, water glittering everywhere – and all the time the pain in my stomach taking pleasure out of everything, keeping me tossing fretfully at night.

Pills & chalky powders & Marie biscuits & cold tea – "Wolfe Solent" -. Folkstories, the rattle of the air-conditioner, Mac's eyes bloodshot, bongoolies between the dogs toes.

I wonder if I will forget this beastly month only thinking of the beauty, not the dragging depression that is centred in my stomach but affects my thoughts & decisions & keeps me lying in a crumpled bed for hours & hours, purposeless, bloated, defeated.

What use is my so-called Buddhism that it cannot raise me from such trifling sickness into the peace I preached about? The truth is that I cannot shake off either mental worry or physical pain – only when I'm reasonably well & contented can I summon up the helpful phrases – & then what is the need of help? My beliefs do not arm me against illness, bereavement or death, all of which I dread.

Perhaps there is a holy man somewhere with the phrase & look to convince me – I am so easily convinced! There is so much I want to do with these last precious months – I must get well, get cheerful, get busy & working again. My stomach will not stop me.

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 10th July 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*You really will have reached Field Head by now, I've been sending letters there for weeks so I hope some of them have reached you. I'm afraid you will find it a bit confusing trying to unpack your witchy notes in the turmoil of Granny moving, particularly as she seems to be bringing in a lot of new stuff. If she doesn't want the black leather sofa and chair we will have them, tell her, sounds most seductive, I can just see myself stretched out on the sofa with my disciples all round me twanging on two stringed instruments – my imagination is a bit muddled between holy men out here and what I imagine literary ladies do in salons at home! Your descriptions of your studies in London among mouldering parchments made my mouth water, it's my dream to discover some secret hoard of historical material, I'm sure your thesis will provide some stunning new facts to rock the academic world – don't let Evans Pritchard or any of those crafty characters see it and pinch all your material. I have abandoned history for my childrens book which I'm enjoying writing though I see no great future for it, still its good discipline to write well within a limited vocabulary and I think a childrens book between every other would be a good idea – if one wrote the others? I finished "Wolf Solent" regretfully, it petered out a bit towards the end I thought but one had got so involved with the characters that it was sad to leave them. I have never read "Lolita" – the subject repulsed me I'm afraid but I must try it sometime.*

*I am feeling better at last, I seemed to have two lots of things wrong with my tummy and the treatment for one aggravated the other but both are now under control and I'm able to look around with pleasure again. I went to the bazaar on Wednesday to take some photographs, how I shall miss the colour and smells and beauty of Indian markets – the incredible variety of the faces, their unhurried absorption and grace, because of course they have all day to decide and the argument is half the fun. There was a man doing card tricks and Nagas and heaps of glittering glass bangles and spices and stalls of ruby red drinks – solid cholera probably but beautiful when sliding down the throat of a man in a gold silk shirt with green bananas slung round his neck like a garland. I am seeing everything extra large of course, as one sees it for the first and last time – and already there are lots of stalls full of cheap hideous printed cloth which everyone wants to buy and poison green plastic baskets instead of the bamboo ones they make themselves. The same story will be repeated here as everywhere, the old skills lost and then when it is too late the loss regretted. Both my schools are on their summer vacations for a month so I'm going to try to get the first draft of my book finished and then I can concentrate on them and on various other trips and things I want to make.*

*We went to dinner with the Highams last night to meet Mr Sinha<sup>399</sup>, one of the Top Men of our new combine, he was very dull like all business men, had no ideas on anything except I*

*suppose other top men and the Market. It was fairly heavy going, we tried books, Mughals, what is wrong with India, the Great Train Robbery<sup>400</sup> and Family Planning but nothing led anywhere but there were no long silences so I suppose it wasn't a complete flop. The Highams aren't a very enterprising pair themselves and will probably find the job a bit of a strain – still it's a huge relief having Simpson gone.*

*Will you tell Granny I'll be writing in a day or two, but I heard from the bank in Burma and they may be able to release 25% of her money if the Exchange Control are agreeable, unfortunately I don't know Burmese currency so can't say how much this is but she will know. It is no good going to Burma because you have to be a resident before you can have it, in any case resident or not they won't let her have more than 25%. I'll let her know more when I hear.*

*Please don't bother to write every week while you're working on your thesis, you'll be sick of expressing yourself, once a fortnight will do! Tim Edye wrote the other day, he had met Jill Walker who said how much she liked you and hoped the "rift" would be mended – this is his interpretation though, you probably know the situation better – in fact undoubtedly do.*

*Fiona seems happy and dedicated but Anne a bit unsettled, we must see if we can't find her something more worthwhile to do to use her brain which is much better than she thinks. She seems to be in with a rather odd crowd in London or perhaps I'm fussing as usual, can't wait to gather my chicks round me again and offer lots of unwanted advice.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 19th July 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your very nice birthday letter which arrived a little early but it's impossible to time these things and it was most welcome. Your kind remarks about my literary potential were happily lapped up – but I'm afraid I see myself as a second class Enid Blyton and certainly have no intention of ever writing my autobiography – some chatty pieces on "My 25 years in Tea" for Woman's Own would be the absolute limit in that line. I have kept a selection of your letters, not all but the most interesting. I have got eleven chapters of my children's book written of the 18 I plan, it has kept me amused and will bring back to me, at any rate, Assam and the animals and birds – it's about a "sanctuary" the children make in the jungle. I had a letter from my agent yesterday saying he had read the synopsis of the Mughals and thought it would make an interesting and entertaining book and would start to tout it round – not the wild enthusiasm I had hoped for but better than a blank refusal and I cheer myself with the fact that agents have to be cagey and not raise the hopes of inexperienced authors. The proof copy of my Indian Legends isn't ready yet.*

*I do hope you will find you have that monster in your net, it is extraordinary to me that one could research away and not know what one was discovering – it shows how very little I know about research. I am toying with the idea of taking a degree by correspondence when I come home, to teach me how to organise my thinking a bit better and not chase so many red herrings and fritter my time. I hope you aren't too squashed in your room, we have big plans for making a sort of cupboard lined with bookshelves for you where Granny's linen is kept at the moment, opening out of your room, but hope it won't be too late to be of use.*

*Nothing of great moment from here, a lot of rain, floods everywhere and the usual confusion as to how to deal with them – the latest ideas we saw discussed in the paper was to divert the Brahmaputra to the Gobi desert – I wonder how many contractors will make a pile on that little scheme and where in fact the Brahmaputra would end up. The Highams gave their first tennis party on Saturday which was relaxed and friendly and everybody turned up to show their goodwill.*

*I have been visiting the local bazaars to take photographs and hope to have a reel ready by Thursday for Tom Poole to take home. It is rather difficult chasing reluctant Nagas through feet of slippery mud in the boiling sun – I didn't in fact manage to corner any Nagas but practically everything in an Indian bazaar is worth photographing.*

*On the way back on Sunday we got stuck in a hole – we were in the jeep, the driver in charge – and spent a long time trying to dig ourselves out before a crowd of jolly men arrived and were able to push us free.*

*I had a letter from Tim Edye saying that when he looked in the hotel register of the place they were staying in Skye he found a fellow guest was Mrs Buckmaser of Field Head – but as they were leaving next day the only time he met her was on his way to the bath and he thought being accosted by a strange man in a dressing gown might give her wrong ideas! Such a pity, they would have got on well.*

*Also heard from Brenda, who has been “relegated” to toothpaste research – she is handed a questionnaire with advice such as “If informant has no teeth, terminate interview” which must be quite funny. What a lot of money must be wasted paying people like her to do things like that. John still hasn't got a job but doesn't sound unduly worried.*

*I'm just off to the school and hospital in a gentle drizzle – the new Family Planning has caught on like mad here and I only hope there aren't too many failures.*

*I have about five thousand silkworms in the old kitchen cupboard, they are incredible things they grow about an inch a day and turn from palest grey to a beautiful blue green with yellow. I think I shall balk at the business of boiling the cocoons but the driver's wife is very knowledgeable and I suppose they haven't got much nervous system. Why they don't get into this silk business seriously – but it is the same reason they don't do anything.*

*Rice planting is starting in earnest this week, very fetching they look too and I shall be brooding as usual about never seeing it again.*

*As I told Granny I have decided to spend my last ten days in India seeing the Pepper Coast from Cochin to Bombay, full of history.*

*Much love – Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 27th July 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Thank you for your letter, I certainly am not bored with hearing from you every week, I look forward all day to the mail, it's just that I thought with all your writing you might be bored having to do more. I expect a certain amount of flurry and excitement is becoming apparent at Field Head but I hope this isn't affecting your studies – anyway now I come to think of it you will be in your Borstal by now. I don't know how long you will be staying there but I hope it's a success and you don't get involved in too many problems. I had a letter from Richard about the house and I don't think there will be any hitches now unless, as he keeps darkly hinting, he decides to get married but even then he can presumably live at Haileybury.*

*I can think of nothing nicer than working on all those old records and do hope someone else doesn't get round to it first. The only snag would be spending my declining years in the Essex Records Office but perhaps I could collect them from nearer? It would be terribly exciting feeling the old villages come alive, and I think I have enough historical imagination but you could watch over that side and see I didn't gush. I had intended to make a study of an Assamese village this summer but haven't felt well enough, anyway it would take more than a few months to do it properly.*

*I have nearly finished my book, it isn't of course what I'd hoped – I wanted to recreate in the jungle sanctuary the sort of magic of “The Secret Garden” and though I felt it myself I haven't made it work for others. I don't think anyone will publish it, as the idea (a*

*commonplace out here) that all gods are one and that as I put it "it was the same god who walked the streets of Bethlehem and the forests of Brindaban" seems to shock the Christian mind. Richard would certainly be horrified – I think a few years ago you would have been too – and all those middle class mothers certainly would. A publisher out here might take it though as the idea is implicit in every Eastern religion. The only reasons (I think!) that I would like it to be published is that it sings the praises of Assam, and would be a sort of thank you offering.*

*It's certainly very beautiful here now, we have been watching several families of blue jays being hatched and reared, one lot in our old pigeon house. The babies are all on the wing now though still being watched over and fed by their mothers and all day the lawn is a pattern of brilliant wings – they are up at crack of dawn and still working until it is nearly pitch dark poor dears. I finished and sent home my film with Tom Poole so I hope one or two come out.*

*My plans are now to fly to Madras, spend a day there (Clive country) and then go on to Cochin by air where I get a boat for a four day trip up the coast, I hope calling in at Calicut and Goa. I'm sure it will all fall through but it keeps us busy thinking it all out and if I can get some photos I could work up an article easily as every inch of the Pepper Coast is full of history. Have at last got a review of Gallipoli in Spectator that arrived yesterday, very good.*

*A featureless week I'm afraid, went into the club on Monday for an hour that's all. I'm going up to Shillong, probably next week, for a breath of fresh air and to see Rosemary who as I feared has failed her Matric. She says a Peace Corps doctor she met asked her to marry him and sent her a ring but she refused it – don't know how much of this to believe but it would have seemed a solution if he was at all reasonable. One of the millions of unsolved problems we shall leave.*

*Haven't heard from Fiona from the Hebrides yet but hope it isn't too disastrous a failure – if they can get a roof they will be all right. Anne had Morag staying when she wrote, just the same it appears, she is supposed to be going to a, don't know which, university, in the autumn but I think her people are doubtful if they can afford it.*

*Even more boring than usual to-day, it is very oppressive and I feel like a sack of damp salt, sagging and wet. Hope to write something brighter from Shillong.*

*Much love from us both, Mummy*

Notebook: Aug 4th. My stomach did stop me, & finally sent me with Mac & lots of Thermos flasks to the refuge of Shillong & Dr Hughes<sup>401</sup>. Am lying in bed in the hotel at the moment, early crows cawing & sparrows slinking & the rumble of thunder.

The drive up was beautiful, the rice planting at its various stages, blue hills, water, birds, & Mikirs in navy cloth making delectable photographs which we didn't stop to take. A short break at Nowgong for a cup of tea where the bearer remembered me from 3 years ago, & was all smiling welcome, incredible Burrapani a wide lake & very beautiful, Shillong as always, its smell of pines & damp wood & wet roads taking me back & back.

On the first evening we took the car out behind the golf course to the little hut, but it got stuck down the lane to Mac's anguish, frantic reversing, beating of foreheads & two giggling Nepalese to watch us. Finally had to walk to the golf club, get taxis, & spend the rest of the evening waiting for Mac to return which he did at 8 p.m. on foot!

Yesterday was spent at the hospital – a grim day – starting with a tube down the nose for two and a half hours. Sat in a chair reading "The Rector of Justin"<sup>402</sup> & ringing a bell every 15 mins for the nurse to come & syphon some of the content out of my stomach & dump them into glass tubes.

This was uncomfortable but fascinating, the contents turning from blue-green to sulphur yellow. After that an enema & then up to the operating theatre for a bowel test. Dr



Hughes said it would be 'uncomfortable but not agony' – it was in fact agony – pain like that makes me fearful of how I would stand up to continual real grinding pain – I couldn't. Death would then be a real escape.

Dr Hughes is tall, pale, quiet, kind, charming – moves through his ceaseless work without a sense of strain & not a flicker of tension or ill-humour. A man like that could restore ones faith – He obviously sees some sense in suffering.

After lunch back to the hospital for the result of the test, long wait in the passages, tiny nurses tramping, Mac restless & wanting to leave, at last the bits of paper that held my fate – amoebic cysts! This is exactly what I wanted, something to explain the pain but not too much – the relief was exquisite – saw Mac off quite happily. Gave Rosemary tea, went to bed with a hot bottle – to toss & toss with a raging headache & rising nausea.

Dinner was a nightmare of wondering whether I'd be sick – but fell into bed & slept at once & now next morning feel only slightly queasy. The mental relief is still a positive cool compress on my fretful imagination – how self-absorbed and self-dramatising I am.



Iris to Alan, Shillong, Assam 5th August 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*As you see I'm up in the pines and the cool mists – what a relief to be away from that sticky heat for a bit too though it isn't cold here, still you can breathe. Somehow I feel much further away from you all, I suppose because I'm cut off from letters, I don't know how long your Borstal is lasting but do hope it is going well. Daddy and I drove up on Monday, Robert let us bring the G.M's Plymouth and his driver but it refused to start in the morning and there was much pacing and cursing before we got going, the real reason for my trip and why we got the V.I.P. treatment was to see Dr Hughes the mission doctor up here. I didn't*

mention this before as I thought it might bother you all, but I have had all my tests now and it isn't the ulcers or other horrors that I visualised but simply persistent amoebic cysts and I'm going into hospital on Saturday for a ten days offensive against them. I just couldn't get rid of the pain and felt so miserable in the heat and watching my last hot weather go without being able to enjoy it that Tom Poole and Daddy decided to bring me up here for a thorough investigation. I had it yesterday and thorough is the word, one of the tests involved a piece of rubber tubing down my nose and then swallowed – you can imagine my horror at having to gulp down yards of rubber when I can hardly swallow a poached egg without imagining I'm choking. It was quite fascinating actually, as they siphoned the contents of my stomach up through this every fifteen minutes for two and a half hours, and one watched them turn from pale blue to green to sulphur yellow (hope you aren't reading this just before a meal). Luckily I had a very good book to read, "The Rector of Justin" by Auchinloss and this kept me occupied, though as it has one of Gollanz's sulphur yellow covers I fear I shall never see one again without thinking of that tube.

The mission doctor, Dr Hughes is the one who operated on Daddy's appendix in 1942 – he does about ten operations a day and the hospital is crammed to every corner with patients but he moves through an impossibly long day with a radiant calmness and makes you feel as if your silly little troubles were all he had to bother about. He is the sort of man who would restore one's faith very quickly if one stayed with him, one forgets all the bitter things one feels about missionaries when meeting someone like him.

Daddy left yesterday, Wednesday, after a rather grisly couple of days pacing up and down outside the hospital but it'll be a relief for him not have my moans to contend with when gets back.

I feel better already and have spent most of my time with Rosemary who is looking well though she is going through the stage of wearing masses of badly applied make-up and a stringy bee-hive hairdo and looks very tarty, but is cheerful and affectionate and trying to look after me very solicitously. She failed nearly every subject of her Matric and talks vaguely of taking it again but I don't see how she'll do any better unless someone makes her work. It is worrying leaving her in a place like this where standards are so very easy-going and every male appears to be a predator, most of her friends have at least one fatherless child and the only thing that worries them is how dark it is, a fair illegitimate boy is quite a status symbol!

I'm staying in the only hotel, it used to be posh but is now seedy though clinging to its faded hunting scenes and College Pudding with custard for lunch. I'm the only European here, the rest of the inmates are presumably businessmen come up to oil the palms of ministers, they are all very jolly and kick off their shoes at mealtimes.

I'm going down to the library to-morrow to get out a supply of books to take into hospital, I expect I will be sitting up as my "cure" seems to consist mostly of enemas, so I hope that in between them I can do some work.

I got the Proof of my book<sup>403</sup> just before I left, it seems a poor little thing now and the illustrations rather dull so I don't think will do more than cover the advance. There is a new editor at Chatto's who is an Oxford friend of my agents which is a good contact. Have brought the other book up with me with an idea of finishing it but doubt if I will.

Shillong is as gay, pretty, grubby and colourful as usual, the colleges are full of tribal girls who wander round in their lovely handwoven shawls. I had meant to look up Mrs Verrier Elwin but don't know now if I will have time, I might go on Saturday, without a car I'm a bit stuck and she lives quite a way out I wish he was still alive.

Rosemary's father has given me the manuscript of a book written by an aunt of his, all about her days in the Klondike gold rush, could be interesting but is actually hilariously banal, they all reply to each other in the affirmative and mount their sturdy long-eared

*friends, perhaps I can extract something out of it for an article without being too cruel. Will write again between enemas,  
Much love – Mummy*

Notebook: Saturday Aug 7th. Two days have passed of nausea rising & abating, of grinding my beastly pills under my jar of Mum, of trailing down to the town and back through the pretty lake with salmon pink Cannas and wine-red water lillies, of going back to into my room smelling of damp wood and lying on my bed & pressing my stomach. Not very pleasant but now I'm in hospital and its better - my stomach still churns but the end is in sight & Dr Hughes only 5 minutes away. I have an emerald green counterpane & have had a lovely dinner & am lying lapped in the scent of the Flit and listening to yapping dogs. Shillong is always nausea & the smell of burnt corn & peanuts roasted in their shells & sudden rain & a medley of faces that keep one peering, gaping enchanted. It is a wickedly immoral place but there is a gaiety in its excess, a jolly sort of wickedness that captivates even as one carps.

Sunday. A grey sky behind the pine trees, which are sougning in the wind – a sweet, sad sound which expresses my mood. How well I shall get to know the shapes of the trees the flowers between the railings, the sounds of bells & brushes & sparrows. Dr Hughes is leaving on Wednesday which is sad, he says I am to have an X-ray after all, I wonder why. I must achieve a routine, at present I feel listless, relieved but faintly depressed too.

The last month on the garden has been a brilliant pattern of jays wings. Several mothers have been feeding babies, one in the pigeon house, & have been swooping down from dawn to dusk to collect insects. The last thing we saw as we had our drink on the verandah in the near dark was a jay's figure on the sundial, feeding herself at last. The babies grew fat and blue & shouted from their nests, rising to a crescendo as the mother approached. Then they began to fly, landing clumsily in the fir trees, to shout again, but to whirr away to safety when the mother gave her harsh warning cry. After a few days she suddenly started to chase her nagging offspring away & the story was ended. A beautiful funny story that lightened many days. That & my story and the purple lagerstroemia<sup>404</sup> & the chunks of rainbows I watched from the paddock in the evening & the egrets in the flooded fields, standing together like a village council. I'm glad I saw the beginning of the rice planting as I won't see its end, but it will be a patchwork of different greens when I go back, the precious rice.

Thursday. The 5th day of days all the same. Waking to the whisper of rain & the rattle of the enema tray, a bath, hot & soothing in the chipped tub, then breakfast on my churning stomach. Writing till 11, then the long lie with another enema rolling about inside like water in a radiator, dozing, reading about Father Acquaviva<sup>405</sup> & Kim<sup>406</sup>, taking pills, feeling a little sick, depressed but generally resigned. The little nurses in their green & striped dresses & tennis shoes bouncing in & out, the old tortoise mali clipping at the grass with scissors, the evening sun sinking behind the dove grey hills, kites flying above the hedge & the long evening leading to another day - the same.

Iris to Alan, Shillong, 13th August 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*Here I still am on a grey afternoon with clouds literally swirling in at the door, half way through my course. The time isn't going too slowly now, have got into a sort of rhythm of writing, reading & dozing & the days slide by, though I feel I've been here about 3 months. Yours & Daddy's birthday presents arrived on my first day in hospital so couldn't have been better as I was feeling very depressed & cut off. Your selection as usual was perfect & I was thrilled with the "autograph"! I have only dipped into them, am trying to make them last as*

*we've packed all our books & won't have anything till we come home (Daddy says another parcel from you is waiting for me.) I read "Warren Hastings" of course, & it was marvellous, even when wrong there is nobody so marvellous as Macaulay. Thank you very much. Daddy got me "The Pleasure of Ruins"<sup>407</sup> which is sumptuous, you must have seen it – have found 2 "howlers" in the Mughal bit though, which gives me confidence for any I may make. I have also been reading a couple of books from the library, one Mughal, one "Kim" which I haven't read for years & is delicious. My course consists mostly of lying flat on my back – for about 5 hours a day – while they pump things into me – a "two-pronged attack" Dr Hughes euphemistically describes it, but I'll draw a veil over it!*

*All my mobile neighbours are very chummy & wander in to tell me of their far worse experiences, & Rosemary comes every evening & is hoping I'll stay in for months!*

*Was very saddened today to meet our little Scots padre Innes & hear his wife has had a stroke – he burst into tears when he told me & I felt helpless. She is in a deep coma & I have said prayers for her, but always feel this is impertinence from me & anyway God must have made his decision. Peter Innes already has this "retarded" son to cope with, it is very hard to understand. The nurses here are all tiny & giggly & bounce about in while plimsolls, mostly Khasis & excellent, far better than English ones. Dr Hughes has gone home, apparently he had a heart attack last year & has to go home every year, sad but my little Indian doctor is very sweet & sympathetic.*

*I'm getting delicious food but as most of the course concerns enemas don't keep it for long!*

*Rosemary is getting fretful about her father again, I think really we upset her & cause a sense of friction in her muddly but fairly serene existence.*

*The clamour will be rising at Field Head, don't let Granny do too much, she can always leave things for us to bring down. Fiona sounds happy but may find it palls, specially if the weather is bad, Granny says you are subsidising her, hope thats not true?*

*Much love to all – am really better, Mummy*





Iris to Alan, Fiona and Anne, Cherideo, 28th August 1965

*Darlings,*

*Taking this opportunity of writing a joint letter, chiefly because I'm out of my stride and trying to catch up. I'm sorry I missed out on last week, there were a series of postal holidays in Shillong and on the Saturday when we planned to shop we had to go to Ella Innes's funeral. This was a very sad affair naturally, but we had all come to expect it and to realise that it was the best thing as far as she was concerned. Peter took it very well though he will find it hard to manage his life and Ian's without her as she treated them both as if they were children and organised every minute. Ian is the real problem, he seems a nice enough lad until one realises he is 26 and hasn't done a thing or had any training.*

*I wasn't sorry to leave Shillong, and was very happy to be home and have doggies, Miranda etc. pleased to see me – all fat and well. Immediately strode round the compound cursing the malis which shows how much better I am, haven't had the energy to garden for months.*

*Daddy came up on Saturday and we spent Sunday up there, took Rosemary for a picnic to Elephant Falls which was lovely with sun and racing clouds and the sigh of pine trees. It was sad saying goodbye to R. and I feel we have deserted her, but don't know what to do as her father won't let her leave him. She is quite a glamour puss when she brushes herself up, nice figure and long sleek black hair (at least sleek when I'm there) and those huge hazel eyes – I'm sure she could find herself a very nice husband if given half a chance.*

*Dorothy came to see me on my last day in hospital, looks older and thinner but is otherwise as giggly as ever, she is planning to type in Calcutta. Shillong is a seething mass of people, a lot of them "tribals" – the girls in sweaters over their hand woven wrap-over skirts, the boys in tight jeans with their lovely coloured cloth round their shoulders – they look very handsome but it is somehow saddening to see them hanging around scruffy cafes with cigarettes drooping from their lips – perhaps this is sentimental and they are probably a lot happier than locked away in their remote hills, clean, healthy but frustrated. It just seems a pity that when they emerge all bright eyed into the world, it such a shabby world they are offered.*

*Have just finished "The crisis of India"<sup>408</sup> which I read with interest but slight irritation – he is absolutely right in everything he says but somewhere between the statistics and the sense of outrage India has slipped between his fingers. He has seen nothing but the poverty and degradation and doesn't seem to have noticed the beauty and gaiety, and though he continually (and rightly) blames the government for the present state of affairs, he doesn't blame us at all for the impossible task we left them. My book will put the blame squarely where it should be – if it ever gets written! I didn't really mean my article to be "skittish", but my mission is to lighten Indian history so as to make it at least readable, the real scholars are such heavy going that only a handful of other real scholars read them!*

*We definitely do want to buy a stills projector, if you can wait till December we could get one then, otherwise we could put down a deposit on an H.P. one but Daddy wants a good, powerful one, better than Richard's with some guard against putting the slides in upside down. Perhaps you could look round. I meant to warn you that a film would be arriving to be developed, and when it is ready could you please send anything that comes out to Dr T.W. Poole, c/o McIntosh, 349 Albert Drive, Glasgow S.1.*

*No sign of the film that Fiona has had for a year and I wonder where the camera is?*

*Big day in Nazira P.O. to-day, golf, tennis and a mid-rains dance – none of which are we going to attend I'm afraid. It's against my principles to start with, and far too hot anyway.*

*Almost September and I've sent for my seeds and the egrets are coming back to the tennis court and the end is in sight, a horrible hot weather but perhaps just as well as it makes India*

*a lot easier to leave! I've got my last ten days touring fixed, fly to Madras and after a day and night there on to Cochin where I catch a boat to Bombay. I don't stop at Goa unfortunately but call in at Calicut and various other old imperial bases and might work up an article to pay for the trip if everything hasn't disappeared from sight.*

*Much love to all, Mummy*

Iris to Alan, Cherideo, 2nd September 1965

*My dear Alan,*

*I'm a little early in an effort to get back into a rhythm and haven't a letter to thank you for. I had one from Granny yesterday sounding a little worked up about the move, I hope she won't let it upset her but I'm sure she'll find the new place a lot easier to run. I hope you won't be too lonely without even Poochie there, I suppose you could go and sleep next door if necessary, feel I must have committed some awful parental lapse in making you afraid of the dark. I also got my History Today yesterday, my article was meaningless having read it so often but the cover was gay, though Mughal miniatures in reproduction aren't a patch on the original.<sup>409</sup> I had a letter from Elek Books asking me if I would like to write the "scholarly text" on a book of photographs of Mughal India, they have apparently done a series called "Ancient Cities of Art" on Athens, Peking etc. Unfortunately I know very little about the architectural aspect of the Mughals, so I would have to read their previous books and see how scholarly I was supposed to be – they say they will meet me and show me these sometime – Robert here I come There was an excellent review of Gallipoli which you probably read in H.T. which we read with tight smiles, mean spirited little people that we are. Actually there's nobody I'd like better to succeed than Robert and he deserves every bit of any credit he gets.*

*Have had a bit of a setback this week, more tummy trouble and the announcement by our Doctor Babu that he was going to give me another course of amoebic injections. However as he approached with the needle I got nervous spasms and couldn't face it, and when we sent for Tom Poole's stand-in he said it was nonsense, I couldn't possibly need more treatment, in fact he reckoned I had been given too much already and both my nerves and stomach needed a rest. So I've been given a mild tranquilliser and a mass of Vitamin pills and am feeling much better to-day. It's been very hot which hasn't helped, but now the rain has come again and everything improved all round – and the psychological effect of writing September at the top of a letter is vastly cheering. Only the political situation looks gloomy but I cannot believe that India and P[akistan] will really start a full scale war, it is difficult to fathom what they think they're up to, especially Pakistan who appears to be the aggressor – but who to believe? I've been reading a soothing book called "Chronicles of Fairacher"<sup>410</sup> to take my mind off my insides, feebly written, without an original thought or phrase but rather charming all the same, all about a Village School and the flower show and so on.*

*I read somewhere that Cambridge had had a project for some time to collect and sort out parish records from all over the country with a view to writing a new type of history<sup>411</sup> – so perhaps we have been forestalled? I shall love just pottering round graveyards and going on outings with the local archaeological society and writing Rosemary Sutcliff's books – my literary aims are not high, although if I could do as well as R.S. I would be delighted.*

*Our only outing was to the club on Monday to see an ancient but quite amusing Peter Sellers film called Mr Topaze. Everyone looking hot and bored as is inevitable at this time of year but the atmosphere in the club is a good deal pleasanter than of yore.*

*On Sunday the local football final was played off in staggering heat, our team was doing well until our goalie flung a couple of balls into his own net by mistake and then he gave up and just stood with folded arms and watched the ball whizz by. Afterwards they produced a microphone and were all set for a public meeting and hour long speeches but I pleaded ill*

health and handed over the trophies in record time, after which the winning team cheered itself lustily and we staggered home. It amazing the amount of fun they get out of racing up and down a ground like a crater field in the blazing sun, and how much fun the audience gets out of seeing someone making himself ridiculous or getting hurt, no true "sportsmanship" to be seen anywhere but lots of hilarious laughter at everyone else's expense, oh well, who can blame them poor dears.

I hope you've managed to collect all the material you need to carry on, and the thesis progresses. You could surely write little pieces on "Familiar Spirits" or "A village witch" without letting out anything sensational or jeopardising your reputation – A.L. Rowse does and you could save your conscience by thinking of the many people to whom you would be giving interest and pleasure – even if they weren't the top scholars?

Much love to all, Mummy

Posted to Alan Macfarlane at Field Head 'Cherideo' September 11th 1965

I have no idea whether this will get to you, everything is somewhat chaotic here at the moment and we haven't had any mail ourselves for ages. It has all happened so suddenly one can't really believe it is true, and rumours are flying madly and every second person one meets might be a paratrooper.<sup>412</sup> So sad, so senseless, and as its impossible for either side to ever "win" one wonders how long their economies and arms will last out. Don't worry about us though, if things become critical they will do another of their evacuations, this will be my third and last I hope.

Actually I have decided to come home anyway, still not being quite fit and it being such a short time before we finally have to leave – but I don't know if I shall get a passage. All the children on their school holidays are stranded here and the first effort will be to get them away I expect – Daddy has gone up to Jorhat to-day to see what chance there is of an air passage. So maybe I will arrive before this letter. Hate to leave Daddy to face the crises and what not but am not much help to him and it'll be one less worry to have me out of the way. He is going to ask to be relieved as soon as his replacement arrives which will be in another month with any luck so it shouldn't be too long a gap.

We are wondering if our heavy luggage got through, it has to go down through Pakistan and left about ten days before the trouble by steamer so might have just made it – typical of us to lose everything – oh well one can't think about one's paltry possessions at a time like this when so many wretched people are suffering.<sup>413</sup> Perhaps it is just as well that this business has flared up at last, it seemed inevitable and something must now be done to settle it. Just wish it could have waited a little longer. One worries about the food situation here until the rice crop is ready in another eight weeks, and of course the tea industry will get badly hit, Daddy has another eight days' supply of oil to run his factory.

As you can imagine all our thoughts have been on this, and much rushing to the wireless for news, though all the reports are so conflicting that one isn't much the wiser at the end. it is truly a sad way to leave India, one could really ring the necks of the politicians who for the sake of pride are plunging millions into chaos and starvation, but the very word "Kashmir" seems to spark off violent emotions beyond one's comprehension.

I got a letter from you last week, do hope you can keep the world from the door till your next grant arrives, you can take up to £10 overdraft and run up bills with Wright till we come home, he won't mind. Fiona will just have to manage on her £30 a month and cut out smoking and parties if necessary, it is a liveable sum and she will just have to live on it. Please don't lend her any more. She seems to have had a wonderful time on Scarp<sup>414</sup> and I hope it will keep her peaceful and relaxed for several weeks at least, have been wondering about The Move and hoping it went off smoothly.

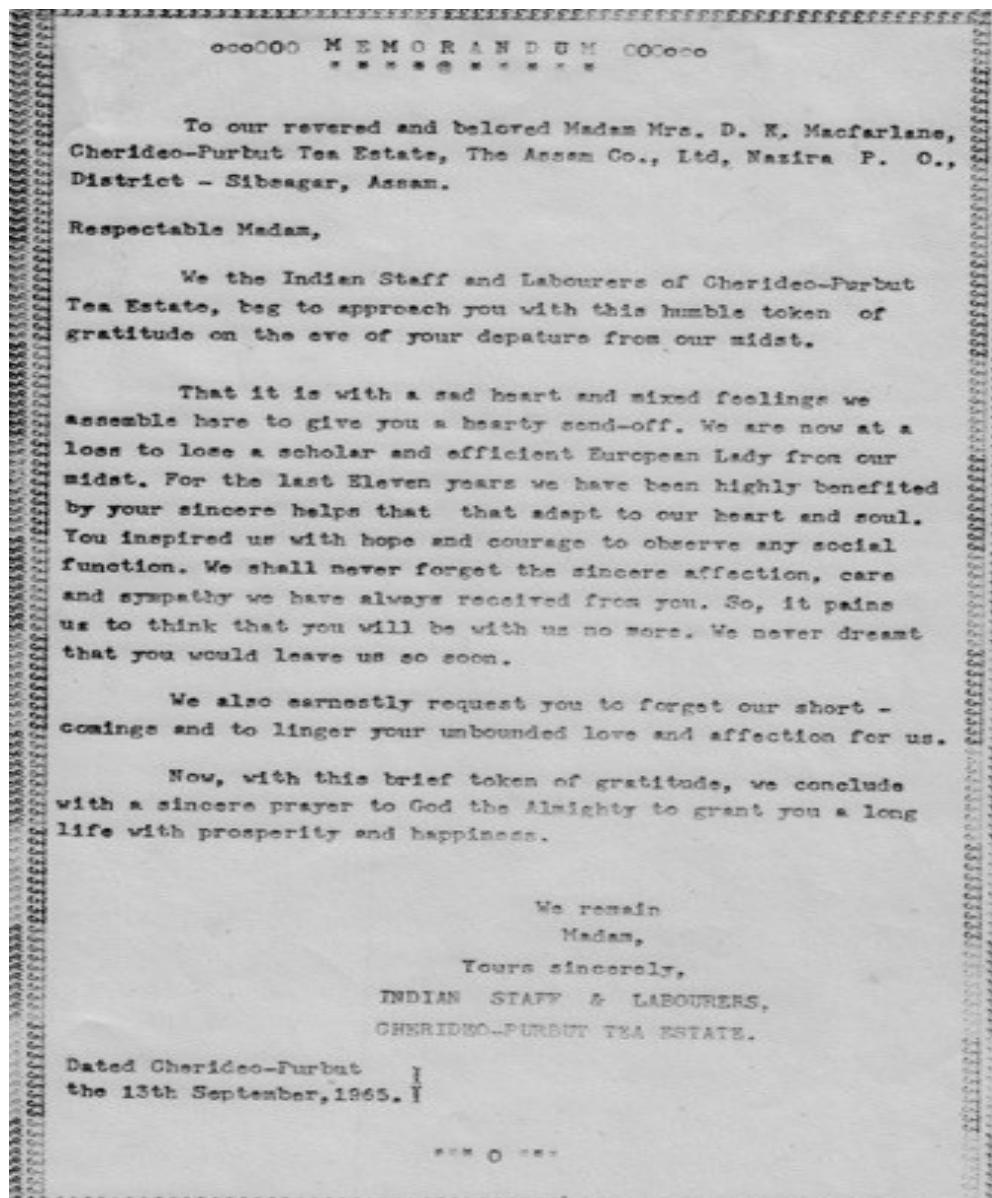


*If I come home I shall probably spend a couple of days with Anne and then a couple with Granny before coming north, will of course ring you up. Was also amused in my last mail to get screeds from some historian who had read my article pulling it into little shreds – and have been composing a reply. Terribly pedantic old boy he sounds, keeps quoting from books I've never heard of and of course all my own source books are being scanned by the Pakistanis so it's difficult to answer him as exactly, but I have myself covered on most counts. How awful if I lose my notes, thank goodness I kept them with me and didn't send them with our heavy luggage as I had planned.*

*Really no news, and the fact that this letter probably won't reach you is a bit frustrating. Daddy is fine, he thrives on crises and is a rock of assurance at a time like this. My tranquillisers are helping me considerably, not that I'm the least worried about Pakistan coming in here, they wouldn't do anything to us and would be only too anxious for us to go on making tea for them.*

*Don't worry about us – we'll be with you in no time.*

*Much love, Mummy*



Iris arrived in England Monday 20th September 1965. She did go back to India several times after Donald's death. The last visit was to Shillong a couple of years before her death.

An Address of Farewell on the eve of departure of Mr. D. M. Macfarlane and Mrs. Irish Macfarlane.

Dhole-Bagan 8 10 1965

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Respected Mr. and Mrs. Macfarlane,

We, the undersigned on behalf of the Managing Committee of the Dhole-Bagan High School and the entire public of this locality most respectfully address you to day on the eve of your departure from Assam due to your retirement from your long service in the Cherideo-Purbut Tea Estate under the Assam Tea Company Limited.

Indeed we, the members of the Managing Committee and the Public are greatly sorry that you will be now going away from this locality and may from Assam probably for good. It is needless to let you know that you both were held in high esteem and affection by the people of this locality for the good and memorable service to this locality and the amount of sacrifice you were pleased to have made in the cause of welfare works and propogation of Secondary Education in this very back ward area.

It will be failing in our duty if we to day do not express you our heartfelt gratitude and sincere affection for your selfless service to the people of this area. Propogation of Education being one of the best welfare works in a human society, you have done more than enough in this regard.

Let us now remember how and what way you both have helped this particular institution from its very inception in the M.E. stage till it has been developed to the stage of almost a full fledged High School catering secondary education to the students of this very back wared locality of the Sibsagar Sub-Division.

Respected Sir and Madam, it was you who at the outset constructed a pucca building to accomodate the M.E. School and yourself were the President of the M.E. School till 1954 and then you were elected the President of the High School in the office of what you continued till to-day. It may be mentioned here that it was you who were kind enough to construct the thatched building for accomodation of the increased enrolment in the High School stage.

to narrate your farther contributions for the development of the School, it was you who kindly provided two Sanitary Latrine to the school, one pucca Building for the Craft Class, one Chowkidar at the cost of the Garden since 1957, the new School building in the same site with a permanent barbed wire fending to the compound of the School. You were kind enough to donate R. 50/- (Rupees Fifty) monthly for the School at the initial stage without the help of which it would not have been possible for the School authorities to meet the monthly establishment charges at a time when no government was available.

Another example of your spirits of your spirits of sacrifice and affection to the School is that Mrs. Macfarlane herself helped the School positively by teaching the subject of English in the school as a member of the Staff when there was dearth of teachers for teaching English in the School.

Besides this help and co-operation you both have rendered to the School mentioned above, there are innumerable occasions when your help and ungrudging co-operation were received from time to time whenever we were in need.

The members of the teaching staff and the students are to-day greatly sorry for the very thought that you are leaving us for good. But respected Sir and Madam, even if you may not be in our midst in future as you were so long, our memory will never fail to

remember you and your acts of kindness and generosity for all time to come. Let us fervently hope you will be also kind enough to remember us and our affection for you so long you will live in this world.

We to-day pray to Almighty God that He may grant you both long life, happiness and prosperity in rest of your life wherever you may be.

With these sincere words of our gratitude, kindness and affection for you, we at the last beg of you to forgive and forget if we at any time did anything which might have displeased or dissatisfied you.

"JOI HIND"

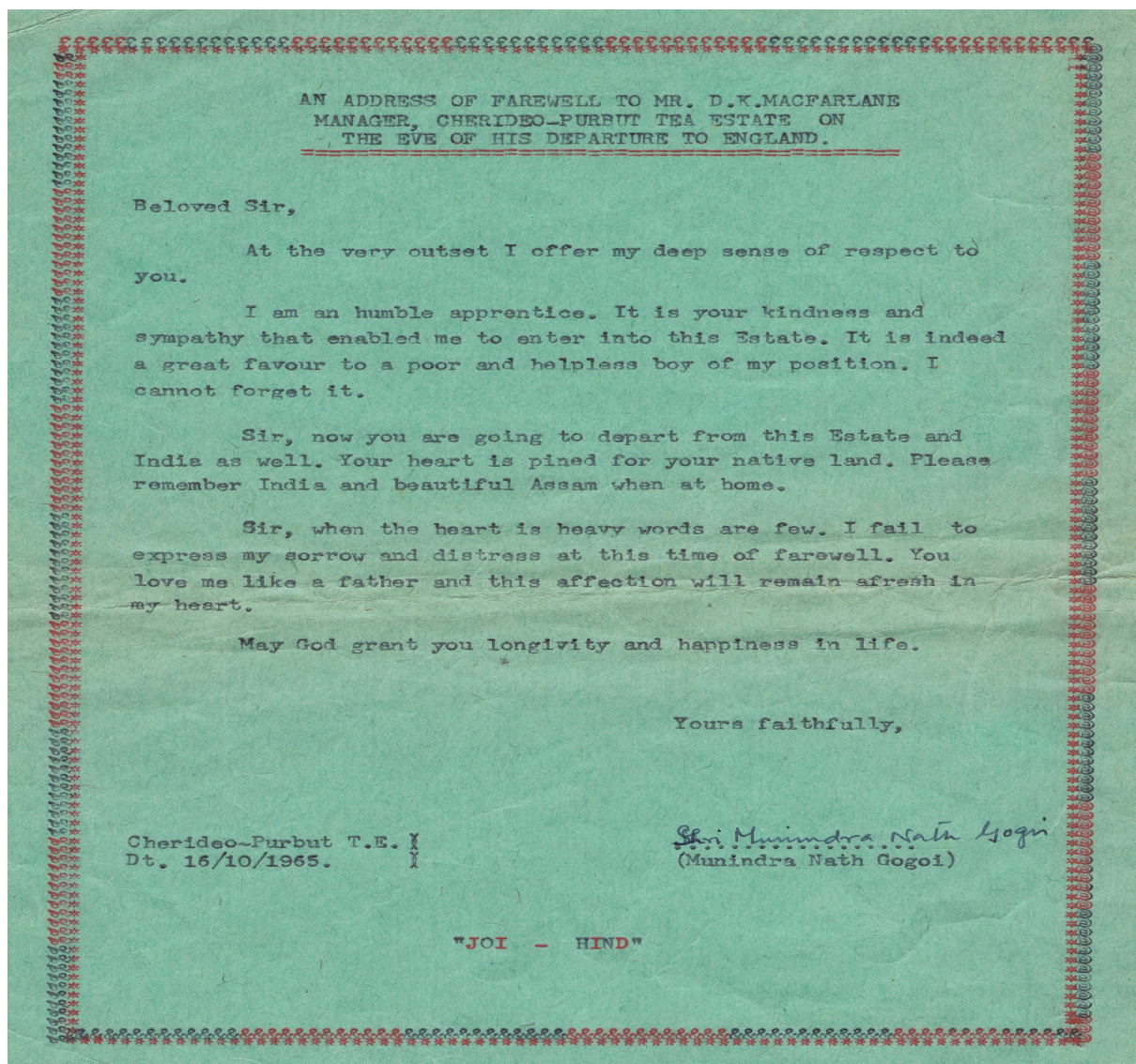
Yours affectionately,

(sig S. Barkataky (Sarat Chandra Bakataky B.A.)

Head Master & Secretary, Dhole-Bagan High School

SN Konger (sig) (Sada Nanada Konger)

For and on behalf of the Managing Committee of the School and the Public of Dhole-Bagan





AN ADDRESS OF FAREWELL ON THE EVE OF DEPARTURE OF  
MR. D. K. MACFARLANE - CHERIDEO-PURBUT  
TEA ESTATE - - - 16-10-1965.

Respected Sir,

We the undersigned on behalf of the Staff and the Labourers of the Cherideo-Purbut T.E. most respectfully address you today on the eve of your departure from Assam due to your retirement from your long service in the Cherideo-Purbut T. E. under the Assam Company Limited.

The Staff and the Labourers are deeply shocked that you will be now going away from the Cherideo-Purbut T. E. and way from Assam for ever. You were held in high esteem and affection by the people of this garden for your valuable and memorable services and your innumerable welfare works for your employees.

Let us to day remember how and what way you have helped the infant Cherideo M. E. School from the very initial stage when there was no help from the educational department. You have been kind enough to donate Rs. 50/- (Rupees Fifty) monthly for the development of the School since the initial stage till to-day. Also a 'Hari Mondir' was erected at Cherideo by the grace of your honour.

Besides this help and co-operation you have rendered your help to the employees of the garden at the very moment when calls for. Moreover we cannot forget you for your affectionate guidance that you have shown to the employees in every step. If you may not be in our midst in future, as you were so long, our memory will never forget you for your acts of kindness and generosity and hope you will be also kind enough to remember us and our affection for you so long you will alive.

To-day we pray to Almighty God that He may grant you long and prosperous for the rest of your life.

With these sincere words of our gratitude and affection for you, we at the last beg of you to forgive and forget if we have dissatisfied you in discharge of our duties.

"JOI HIND"

THE STAFF AND LABOURERS OF  
THE CHERIDEO-PURBUT TEA ESTATE - THE ASSAM  
COMPANY LIMITED.

Donald arrived back in England 23rd October 1965 and never returned to India.

## **A note on Donald and Iris's finances**

Although there are many gaps and evidence is fragmentary, it would seem that the constant struggle to make ends meet, which can be seen in the letters and other materials, reflected a real structural deficit throughout their time in India. This is a very simplified picture of their income and expenditure which fluctuated over time. There is very little on the early period up to 1950, so I will divide the account into the three periods determined by my education, always one of the largest expenses for my parents.

From 1950 to 1955, I was at the Dragon School, a preparatory boarding school in Oxford, where the fees were roughly £300 a year. Fiona and Anne were much less expensive, though there were other major costs such as flying me out to Assam for Christmas in 1952, contributions towards rent and upkeep at the English home and several periods when Iris was also at home and on one occasion renting a house for several months. There were also the costs in India.

My father's basic salary as the manager of a tea garden during this time was on average about £1000 p.a. with various allowances, with some small tax and pension contributions. There were also bonuses as a share of company profits. These were running at an average of about £500 a year for this period, so the total income was roughly £1500 p.a. For comparison, at the end of this period, a comfortable house in the Lake District which they bought cost £3,500. Thus the three children and all their costs over the year probably absorbed one third of Donald's income, leaving roughly £1000 p.a. for other costs. The tone of the letters in this period is not desperate.

In the period 1955-1960, when I was at my next boarding school, the ratio deteriorated and the letters show their increasing worry over money. The basic salary inched upwards and then there was a leap in 1957 so that the basic salary was then about £1200 a year and a little more with various allowances. But the company was doing much less well and the dividends were half what they had been and were more heavily taxed in India. So my father's pay with bonuses hardly increased in these five years, while the cost of living, both in the U.K. and Assam was rising and, in particular, the children were becoming much more expensive.

The family home, bought in 1955 with a large mortgage, its upkeep, and payments to my grandparents for care of the children during school holidays caused constant worry. Yet the crippling charge was my school fees at Sedbergh which were at least £250 a term, roughly absorbing over the year half of my father's income. If we add Fiona and Anne's education at Fairfield school, costing roughly £500 a year for both of them, this absorbed another third, leaving very little for life in Assam. The consequence was that he started to borrow from an Indian contractor. The first mention of this is in a letter of 1960, and in 1963 the debt, after some repayments, was still £1597, so the sum may have been considerable. This type of loan was not permitted by the Company and almost led to my father losing his job.

The last period, 1960-5, was equally, if not more, difficult. The salary had increased to a basic pay of about £2,500, but the commissions were now very small indeed. My father was paying interest on his loan to the contractor and trying to pay back the principal. I was a little less expensive, as I had scholarships at Oxford for five years, so I cost my parents about £500 a year. Fiona and Anne were in India 1960-3. When Fiona came back in 1963 to go to Art College, this again cost my parents about £400 a year. So probably, in all, at least £1000 a year was going on education.

There were, of course, various perks or advantages. The bungalow in Assam was free, as were eight servants, though not the two cooks. There was a company car and some free medical treatments. Yet club bills were considerable and home leaves were expensive. The

fares of Fiona and Anne back to India, and then back to England, were costly and not paid for by the Company.

Consequently, when my parents arrived back precipitately in the Autumn of 1965, they were pretty hard up. They were still in debt to the company (for the contractor's loan) and with a relatively small pension of £900 a year, only about a third of their previous income. The next years were also a struggle as my father failed to find a suitable job. Only the sale of the Lake District house and downsizing to a cottage in Yorkshire and a croft in the Hebrides temporarily saved them. Most importantly, the children were no longer dependent, except for small items of support.

It is a salutary story and leaves me aware of the huge sacrifices my parents made, uncomplaining, and concealing their difficulties as best they could from us..

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## **Acknowledgements**

I made the initial selection of materials and prepared it for publication. Then Sarah Harrison supplemented and re-organized the materials, in particular locating materials about many of the people and events mentioned in the book. I would like to thank her, once again, for her enormous help.

I would also like to thank several correspondents, in particular Terry Luscombe, for their help with this book.

The pictures of the General Manager's Bungalow and the Office at Nazira are reproduced from H.A. Antrobus, a History of the Assam Company 1839-1953.

- <sup>1</sup> Nurse
- <sup>2</sup> Mds = maunds. A maund is about 37 kg.
- <sup>3</sup> Carriage
- <sup>4</sup> This was just over £1 a month, the £1=13.33rs at this time.
- <sup>5</sup> The cottage was on the North Cornwall coast, where the family had spent holidays in the 1930s.
- <sup>6</sup> Alan Cowan was the husband of Pat Cowan, a close friend of Iris and Donald. Pat was Alan's godmother.
- <sup>7</sup> Farex and groats were foods for young children.
- <sup>8</sup> Almost everything in Britain was subject to rationing after the war and did not end completely until 4th July 1954.
- <sup>9</sup> There were riots from 24th October to 11th November in Bihar, and there had been riots in Calcutta from 16th August.
- <sup>10</sup> Violet's sister was living in Oxford, but leaving for India with her husband so Iris and family would be able to take over her house while on leave in England.
- <sup>11</sup> Iris's youngest brother born 10th April 1933.
- <sup>12</sup> The Khasis are an indigenous ethnic group who live in north-eastern India .
- <sup>13</sup> Virol = a health drink of the time.
- <sup>14</sup> I had broken my arm when falling out of a tree some months before and it had set badly and had to be re-broken (without anaesthetics).
- <sup>15</sup> Sheila Macfarlane, born in El Paso, Texas 25th March 1920. She did not go to Oxford but joined the U.S. foreign service and was posted subsequently to Guatemala, Nicaragua and Torreon, Mexico.
- <sup>16</sup> Possibly her cousin Barbara Turbett, living with her mother in 1949 at 39, Kenilworth Court, Lower Richmond Road, Putney.
- <sup>17</sup> Brigadier Francis C.A. Troup and wife Vera, 174 Old Brompton Road, London. Brigadier Troup was an army friend of her parents , who had been in India until 1932.
- <sup>18</sup> Heather, daughter of Eric Haughton James (Iris's grandfather's brother), born 1896, died 1960. She married Dr George Chesney. Their eldest daughter Neva (born 1923) married Alex James (born 1918), son of Eric Haughtons older brother John Ernest James. Alexander and Neva lived in Canada. they had married in 1946 and flew to New York on 1st June 1947 and went from there to Canada.
- <sup>19</sup> 'By the Way' was the name of the rented house near Broadstone, Dorset, where we were living.
- <sup>20</sup> Horse allowance for D.M. noted in Company papers, 10th December 1948.
- <sup>21</sup> Presumably a pet dog.
- <sup>22</sup> A mynah is an Indian bird, famous for its ability to mimic human beings.
- <sup>23</sup> This was a visit to our relatives in Scotland, including Donald's parents and his brother and sister-in-law, Alan and Jean. Photographs of this visit are in *Dorset Days*.
- <sup>24</sup> Babs Meredith, the daughter of John and Daphne Meredith of Amgoorie T.E., Amguri-Haloating, Sibsagar.
- <sup>25</sup> Tom Darby was a long-term friend of Donald's from before the war. He had joined the Assam Co. in 1934 aged 23. He and his family are recorded in a ship's manifest as follows: Thomas Ralston Darby, 38, Haxtoun, Bothwell, Glasgow, tea planter, travelled from London 25th November 1948 to Bombay with his wife, Alice Elizabeth 38, and children, Kathleen Jane 6, David Binnie Ralson 3, Alexandra [Xania] 2
- <sup>26</sup> Dikhu (Dekhoo on Assam Co. map) runs north-west from the Naga Hills, passing Lakmijam and Nazira and runs south of Sibsagar, eventually joining the Brahmaputra.
- <sup>27</sup> Hooluk monkey, the "hero" of the story that Iris was writing for them.
- <sup>28</sup> Alan's eighth birthday was 20th December
- <sup>29</sup> This was at the Nazira club, the central club for the Assam tea company, which features as a social and sporting centre in many of the letters.
- <sup>30</sup> Sadly, this diary has been lost.
- <sup>31</sup> Antrobus wrote (*Assam Company*, 238-9): 'On 15th August there occurred one of the worst earthquakes Assam has ever experienced... In spite of the magnitude of this disaster, the recorded loss of human lives was mercifully small... The effect of this disastrous earthquake on the Assam Company's property was relatively slight.
- <sup>32</sup> Corydon Lodge was a Scottish gamekeeper's lodge where Donald's parents, went for holidays and where Alan and Fiona occasionally joined them.
- <sup>33</sup> Duncan Davidson Mowatt
- <sup>34</sup> The Egyptians, objecting to the British presence in the Canal Zone, broke the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 in October 1951. They began to encourage attacks on British officials. In January 1952 these attacks led to British troops storming Egyptian police barracks at Ismailia.

<sup>35</sup> If I did, it is sadly lost.

<sup>36</sup> P.N.E.U. the Parent's National Education Union, was founded in 1887 by Charlotte Mason. It provided distance learning materials and Fiona and Anne would later attend the school itself in Ambleside.

<sup>37</sup> The Humber Hawk motor car had been used on their leave by Donald and Iris and was then shipped to India.

<sup>38</sup> The nickname given to Iris's father.

<sup>39</sup> This was a Christian boys' camp, run on the south coast of England at Forres, at which my uncle Richard was an 'officer'.

<sup>40</sup> Roger Werner, married to Pamela, was a war-time friend of Donald's and another assistant manager with the Assam Tea Company. He was born in 1916 and died suddenly in Assam on 20th January 1957. Pamela died on 8th December 2011. Their son Charles was born in 1948.

<sup>41</sup> Probably Elizabeth Higham, daughter of Robert and Jean.

<sup>42</sup> The first reference to a pet dachshund.

<sup>43</sup> Derek Bentley was accused of the murder of a policeman.

<sup>44</sup> The de Havilland DH 106 Comet was the world's first commercial jet airliner. BOAC began to fly them in May 1952. Rather alarmingly, within a year three Comets were lost after suffering catastrophic in-flight break-ups. Two of these were found to be caused by structural failure resulting from metal fatigue in the airframe, a phenomenon not fully understood at the time. The other one was due to overstressing of the airframe during flight through severe weather. The Comet was withdrawn from service after a crash near Naples in April 1954 after which Comet 1's certificate of airworthiness was revoked. The weakness was found to be particularly due to the square shaped windows causing stress concentration two or three times greater than across the rest of the fuselage. The square windows of the Comet 1 were replaced by the oval versions used on the Comet 2, which first flew in 1953, and the skin thickness was increased slightly. Remaining Comet 1s and 1As were either scrapped or modified with oval windows.[Wikipedia]

<sup>45</sup> The Deanes were a family whom my mother had first known during the war when she returned to India. By coincidence they moved to a house within a mile of the house where her parents lived near Broadstone, Dorset, and we children became friends.

<sup>46</sup> The Australian touring cricket team played Oxford University in the Parks at Oxford. There is no note in my letters that I went to see them.

<sup>47</sup> The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2nd June 1953, which was widely celebrated.

<sup>48</sup> The climbing of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on 29th May 1953.

<sup>49</sup> Borpatra Tea Garden, belonging to the Janzie Tea Association, near Sibsagar, was east of Tingalibam

<sup>50</sup> Vera (Nita) Rigby, nee Parker, who died in 1990. Her husband Geoffrey was a tea planter in the Dooars area, and her son, Jocelyn was born in 1937.

<sup>51</sup> Tim Edye and his wife Celia were life-long friends of Iris and Donald. Timothy Huish Edye was born on 8 August 1910 in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India. his father, Ernest, was 26 and his mother, Alice, was 28. He was born in 1910 in India and they had one son, Antony. Tim was a tea planter with the Jhanzie Tea Association.

<sup>52</sup> Alas, the few photographs I did get back from an older boy who had borrowed my camera were awful.

<sup>53</sup> Swanage was a seaside town on the south coast where I went a couple of times to a Christian boys camp with my uncle Richard.

<sup>54</sup> Jean Wallace with sons Stephen (aged 8) and Christopher (aged 6) arrived in Liverpool from India on the 'Cicilia' 9th August 1953 and were living in Swanage. Her husband Ian was a doctor.

<sup>55</sup> Panitola is a Tea Estate, near Tokai, north-east of Tingalibam.

<sup>56</sup> Whistlers are a species of bird.

<sup>57</sup> A pokrie is a small pond.

<sup>58</sup> Indian Independence day is August 15th (1947).

<sup>59</sup> Geraldine May Coupar only stayed for about three years in India and then went to the Gold Coast in 1956, her husband Kenneth became a cocoa buyer.

<sup>60</sup> Ruairidh Paterson Ross, born about 1925, and his wife Elizabeth or Betty, were tea planters. Their children Morag (born about 1948) and Rosalyn (born about 1950), became close friends with Iris' children. Ruairidh also worked for the Assam Tea Company.

<sup>61</sup> Jocelyn Rigby, was born in 1937 and went out to Assam as a tea planter himself in 1958.

<sup>62</sup> Jim Corbett, *Man Eaters of Kumaon* (1944)

<sup>63</sup> . Indian Standard Time

<sup>64</sup> Probably Alice, wife of Thomas Ralston Darby, another tea planter with the Assam Company.

<sup>65</sup> Mohurs were last minted in British India in 1918, but some princely states continued to mint them until after 1947.

<sup>66</sup> . Blue Chatoo - Chatoo Baboo, alias Aushootos Day, who was somehow involved in the kidnap of Sreenath Rae, editor of the 'Bhaskur' in Calcutta, in 1840. [The Asiatic Journal]

<sup>67</sup> Robert George Garnett Higham

<sup>68</sup> John Masters, the well-known novelist, including a number on India.

<sup>69</sup> The school near Cherideo. A recent description of it reads: "Dhole Bagan HSS was established in 1919 and it is managed by the Department of Education. It is located in Rural area. It is located in NAZIRA block of SIBSAGAR district of Assam. The school consists of Grades from 6 to 12. The school is Co-educational and it doesn't have an attached pre-primary section. The school is Not Applicable in nature and is not using school building as a shift-school. Assamese is the medium of instructions in this school. This school is approachable by all weather road. In this school academic session starts in April. The school has Government building. It has got 6 classrooms for instructional purposes. All the classrooms are in good condition. It has 2 other rooms for non-teaching activities. The school has a separate room for Head master/Teacher. The school has Barbed Wire Fencing boundary wall. The school has have electric connection. The source of Drinking Water in the school is Hand Pumps and it is functional. The school has 1 boys toilet and it is functional. and 1 girls toilet and it is functional. The school has a playground. The school has a library and has 1200 books in its library. The school does not need ramp for disabled children to access classrooms. The school has 15 computers for teaching and learning purposes and all are functional. The school is having a computer aided learning lab. The school is Provided and Prepared in School Premises providing mid-day meal".

<sup>70</sup> Notes on the plot are on the back of the first page in the notebook.

<sup>71</sup> Black labrador puppy

<sup>72</sup> Well-known thriller writer.

<sup>73</sup> "Dr Babu"

<sup>74</sup> Reference to my letter of 8th April from Field Head.

<sup>75</sup> I have found no trace of this.

<sup>76</sup> The notebooks were the nearest Iris ever came to keeping a diary.

<sup>77</sup> Their dog at Field Head.

<sup>78</sup> Dhole Bagan H.S.

<sup>79</sup> Lying just south of Cherideo.

<sup>80</sup> In Dibrugarh district.

<sup>81</sup> Reference to the English poet, A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*

<sup>82</sup> Probably the detective story.

<sup>83</sup> Shiva Dhole (Sivadol) temple.

<sup>84</sup> Later called Noddy.

<sup>85</sup> Increasing tension in an Arab-Israeli conflict which led to the Suez Canal being closed to shipping from October 1956 until March 1957.

<sup>86</sup> "Kingdom of Golden Gardens" was published in the Sunday Statesman 18th November 1956. Although nothing is mentioned earlier, Iris had been assiduously working on the history of the Ahoms.

<sup>87</sup> An annual winter party given at Nazira club.

<sup>88</sup> Dog formerly called Toad.

<sup>89</sup> The wedding of Iris's younger brother Robert to Angela Robertson was on 18th August 1956. Francis was the best man.

<sup>90</sup> Due to the Suez Canal closure.

<sup>91</sup> Ray (Raymond Cecil Charles) and Lavender Corps were at Cherideo in the outer garden where Ray was assistant manager. He was born in 1922 and came to India with Lavender in November 1945.

<sup>92</sup> David Venters is noted as a School Prefect at Sedbergh, and in the same history sixth (Clio) as Iris' brother Robert in 1952. He was a rugger player and boxer and artist, and left at the end of Summer 1953. He travelled to Bombay in 1956 and became a tea planter, and in 1959 went to Tanganyika also as a tea planter.

<sup>93</sup> Bhuban Chandra Handique, author of, among other things, *Industries of Ancient Assam* (1959).

<sup>94</sup> Robert Higham and his wife Jean were Tea Planter friends. Robert came to India in 1937 and was married in 1944. Their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1947 and son Paul in 1950.

<sup>95</sup> John Gordon Darby joined the Assam Co. in 1952 and resigned in 1960.

<sup>96</sup> Dulal Barkataki, Dhruvajouti Barua and Amal Chandra Hazarika, all tea garden assistants.

<sup>97</sup> Pyuli Phukan was an Assamese freedom fighter, hanged by the British in 1830.

<sup>98</sup> Cherideo staff.

- <sup>99</sup> The sixth Mughal emperor, son of Sher Jahan.
- <sup>100</sup> Archbishop of Cyprus and first President of Cyprus from 1960
- <sup>101</sup> The Munich Air Disaster occurred on 6th February 1958 when the Manchester United football team, among others were on the plane which crashed at Munich. Twenty-three died and twenty-one survived.
- <sup>102</sup> H.A. Antrobus, *A History of the Assam Company, 1839-1953* (Constable, 1957). Hinson Allan Antrobus was born in 1890 and was described as a Tea and Rubber merchant in 1939, living with his wife, Minnie, at Sevenoaks, Kent. He died in 1963 and his wife, in 1962.
- <sup>103</sup> BBC programme on which a panel of experts tried to answer questions sent in by the audience.
- <sup>104</sup> Author of the Perry Mason detective stories.
- <sup>105</sup> Annabelle and Phyllida were the names of the girls that Iris used in her book *The Children of Bird God Hill* (1967) . Andrew was clearly me.
- <sup>106</sup> Probably *Letter from Assam* above.
- <sup>107</sup> No letter exists but Denis Matthews performed at Sedbergh School on 14th February.
- <sup>108</sup> Robert, tea planter at Tyroon, T.E., Kharikatia, Jorhat [McLeod & Co. were the managing agents]. His wife, Pam, was one of Iris's closest friends. Their sons were Robert, born 1949 and James, born 1951
- <sup>109</sup> May Robertson
- <sup>110</sup> Emmett
- <sup>111</sup> No cine film taken in Assam has survived.
- <sup>112</sup> Dr Emmett was Lt Colonel Lionel Charles Renwick Emmett, born in India in 1913 and died in England in 1996. After the war he worked as a general physician in the tea plantations in Assam.
- <sup>113</sup> C.P. Marriott, my housemaster at Lupton House, Sedbergh School.
- <sup>114</sup> For a holiday in Assam.
- <sup>115</sup> The Boddington family, whose son, Mike, was a friend of Alan and Fiona in the Lake District.
- <sup>116</sup> Stephen Grieve, a friend at the Dragon School who lived not far away in the Lake District.
- <sup>117</sup> Mr Doogan was the manager of Brathay Hall, and the father of Michael, a boy a couple of years my senior in my house at Sedbergh.
- <sup>118</sup> The Listener was a weekly magazine published by the BBC which ran from 1929-1991.
- <sup>119</sup> Hoolock monkey (a gibbon).
- <sup>120</sup> J.H. Burnett, in class IIB in Sedbergh in Summer 1943. Published a number of articles on Assamese natural history in 1958 and 1959 in the *Journal of the Bombay natural History Society*, *Oryx* etc, including on the Manas river.
- <sup>121</sup> Used for vitamin deficiency and skin disease in humans but no note of its use for animals.
- <sup>122</sup> Anti-malarial pills.
- <sup>123</sup> Nothing found about this.
- <sup>124</sup> Dated 4th May.
- <sup>125</sup> My father's younger brother, Alan, was a surgeon at Law Hospital, Wishaw in Scotland.
- <sup>126</sup> Bimala Prasad Chaliha, a leader in the Indian National Congress and Prime Minister of Assam for three five-year terms.
- <sup>127</sup> Pat Cowan, my godmother, and Jean Macfarlane, the wife of my father's brother Alan.
- <sup>128</sup> My father had been appointed Temporary Acting General Manager of the Assam Tea Company, so there was a move to the Burra Bungalow in Nazira, which happened on 24th June.
- <sup>129</sup> Thomas Ralston Darby was a planter at Gelakey T.E., born 1910, married to Alice.
- <sup>130</sup> The Toklai Tea Research Institute, established in 1911.
- <sup>131</sup> This is written as from Assam Co. Ltd, Nazira - the General Manager's bungalow, though they did not move there until a week later. Date stamp in India is 16th June, a Monday and the day my mother usually wrote.
- <sup>132</sup> Airmail letter form
- <sup>133</sup> American detective series writer, including Perry Mason.
- <sup>134</sup> Annual women's tennis competition, played between Britain and the United States from 1923 to 1989. In 1958 Christine Truman's victory led to a rare win for Britain.
- <sup>135</sup> John Surtees, racing driver (1934-2017).
- <sup>136</sup> Charles Anthony (Tony) Yates, born 1921 and joined the Assam Company in 1947.
- <sup>137</sup> Esmond Percy Lumley-Ellis, born 1906 and married Alice Rosemary Bliss. General Manager of the Assam Tea Company 1956-1961.
- <sup>138</sup> This was Bill (William Joseph Cecil) Charlier, a tea planter at Towkok T.E., whose photographs and reminiscences are on the 'Koi Hai' website, including pictures of his plane.

- <sup>139</sup> Thakubari was a district on the north side of the Brahmaputra where there was also a tea company club of the same name.
- <sup>140</sup> Officer Training Corps camp, which I was to attend from Sedbergh.
- <sup>141</sup> In her book *Daughters of the Empire* (2006), Iris wrote about my sisters, "They had a Khasi ayah, unaccountably called Mrs. Dykes, who told them stories as she wandered through the tea bushes with them and the goats."
- <sup>142</sup> The British Empire and Commonwealth Games were held in Cardiff on 18-26 July 1958
- <sup>143</sup> There is no letter telling of his death.
- <sup>144</sup> Brendan Bracken born in Ireland in 1901, was a School Governor of Sedbergh, an "old boy" who arrived when he was 19, claiming to be 15 and an Australian orphaned in a bush fire. As a close confidant of Winston Churchill he was elected to Parliament in 1929 and was made a Peer in 1952. He died of lung cancer.
- <sup>145</sup> Pat Smythe was a famous horse jumper.
- <sup>146</sup> The Edinburgh tattoo.
- <sup>147</sup> Dacre John Gare Mogg, born 1936, died 2012. Joined the Jorhaut Tea Company in 1957 as an assistant manager.
- <sup>148</sup> Helen, wife of Norman Esslemont, of Napuk T.E., Singlo Tea Co., where the Sonari club was situated.
- <sup>149</sup> Peter Innes - London Gazette 15th June 1974 Rev. Peter Innes was awarded the M.B.E. 'for services to the British community in Assam'.
- <sup>150</sup> On 4th November at Sedbergh.
- <sup>151</sup> I referred to an operation in a letter dated 2nd November, but did not link it to either my mother or father.
- <sup>152</sup> NASA's launch, Pioneer 1, was launched on 11th October 1958, but did not reach the moon as planned.
- <sup>153</sup> Fiona kept her own diary.
- <sup>154</sup> Dr Thomas Williams Poole, the Assam Co. doctor, his wife Kathleen and the children, were among Donald and Iris's friends in Assam. Tom was born in 1921 and Kathleen in 1924.
- <sup>155</sup> Charles Augustus Pitt Davies ("Cappie") was born 1909 in Quetta, married Eleanor Margaret Coombes ("Peggy") 1943 in India.
- <sup>156</sup> Roy Boswell (1914-2000) Behubor T.E., Nazira, husband of Johanna ("Josie")
- <sup>157</sup> Near Lakmijan on the Dikhu.
- <sup>158</sup> P.R. Shortt, Rangagora T.E., Tinsukia
- <sup>159</sup> Vibhu Raj Assam Tea Co.
- <sup>160</sup> Muttrapore T.E., Sonari
- <sup>161</sup> Douglas and Margaret Lobban, Jaboka T.E., Sonari
- <sup>162</sup> John Lampitt, Scientific Officer, Assam Company
- <sup>163</sup> Dr Thomas Norman Amgoorie T.E., Amguri-Haloating
- <sup>164</sup> Peter Sehmer (1922-2000), Borbam T.E., Amguri Haloating. Married Ann Monk in 1957. [Gill and I visited them in Assam in 1970 on our way back from Nepal to England. At that time they were living at Amgoorie T.E.]
- <sup>165</sup> The deliberate misspelling echoed the humorous chatting between Pam Shaw and Iris.
- <sup>166</sup> Vibhu Raj, the Board gave him permission to marry in August 1958.
- <sup>167</sup> Gussel Brown was Stephen Gilbert Bathe Brown, Jorehaut Tea Company, Cinnamara, born 1914. During the war fought in in the Gurkhas and was captured by the Japanese in Singapore. He was married to Doreen Hilda.
- <sup>168</sup> Jocelyn Rigby
- <sup>169</sup> Rosita Forbes, published in 1939.
- <sup>170</sup> Gerald Houldey, (1906-1966), Director of the Assam Company at the London office, 5 Laurence Pountney Hill E.C.4
- <sup>171</sup> Leslie Sidney Sawtell (1920-1999) joined the Assam Co. in 1953 as the company accountant at Nazira..
- <sup>172</sup> Carbon copy - to all three children.
- <sup>173</sup> Alexander S. Barrie, Mackeypore T.E., Nazira, born 1923, his wife Hilda was born in 1913.
- <sup>174</sup> B.B. is the Burra (big) Bungalow, or General Manager's house.
- <sup>175</sup> Same number as in the last photograph taken of the Assam Company, Nazira, January 1960, although Iris was not in that photograph.
- <sup>176</sup> John Patrick Keble Martin, (1911-1987). Bamon Pookrie T.E., Nazira, Joined the staff in 1932, married to Mollie Jessie who died in 1984.
- <sup>177</sup> The book was eventually published by Chatto & Windus as 'The Children of Bird God Hill' in 1967
- <sup>178</sup> Donald Wise wrote an article on the Nagas in the London Daily Express which caused an outrage.



<sup>179</sup> Edward Pritchard Gee (1904-1968), wild life photographer in India.

<sup>180</sup> Iris did eventually write the book and it was published by Chatto & Windus in 1967.

<sup>181</sup> Peter Ramsay Cruden (1920-1998) married Daphne King in 1945. Kharikatia T.E., Mariani

<sup>182</sup> R.N. Clifford, Kathonibari T.E., Mariani

<sup>183</sup> Arthur Ian Leetham, born August 1931 in Darjeeling, India, went to Assam in 1953 and married Elizabeth in 1956. They had three children.

<sup>184</sup> Charles Anthony Yates (1921-1998) unmarried, Assam C., Nazira

<sup>185</sup> Binaca Hit Parade was an English service of Radio Ceylon which played western pop hits.

<sup>186</sup> Denys Aubrey Tudor Wild, bn. 1925 Assam Co., Nazira .

<sup>187</sup> As yet, it has not been able to find out anything about him.

<sup>188</sup> Noted as performing on 27th April 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

<sup>189</sup> The nearest garden to the S.W. of Cherideo, where Robert Higham was the Manager.

<sup>190</sup> This trip was planned to follow the route taken by the poet Wordsworth through France in 1790.

<sup>191</sup> Thomas Herbert Popley (1911-1982) Suffrey T.E. and wife Elizabeth

<sup>192</sup> Krishna Chandra Bardolai, tea planter born 1923, on the Assam Tea Company staff from 1951 with wife Naba.

<sup>193</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose poems I was studying for my exams.

<sup>194</sup> "Bird God Hill" published 19th July in the Sunday Statesman.

<sup>195</sup> Newly installed CTC machines. Crush, tear, curl is a method of processing black tea in which the leaves are passed through a series of cylindrical rollers with hundreds of sharp teeth that crush, tear, and curl the tea into small, hard pellets. This replaces the final stage of orthodox tea manufacture, in which the leaves are rolled into strips. [Wikipedia]

<sup>196</sup> 'A' level examinations.

<sup>197</sup> A Sedbergh school magazine.

<sup>198</sup> Iris kept carbon copies of the letters she wrote so that she could send the general parts to my sisters' as well and then give each of us a special ending.

<sup>199</sup> This refers to a hitch-hiking tour that I took with a friend from school through France, Switzerland and Germany in the footsteps of William Wordsworth. The details of this tour, with photographs, are in Alan Macfarlane, *Sedbergh Schooldays* (2018) and *Lakeland Life* (2019).

<sup>200</sup> I was thinking of applying to Worcester College, Oxford, to read history. Robert had been at Worcester a few years earlier and Iris obviously hoped to get his advice and help.

<sup>201</sup> Man who collected the post.

<sup>202</sup> Born 1953

<sup>203</sup> The tea garden where they were living.

<sup>204</sup> I went to spend a few days at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, on a yacht with my school friend Geoffrey Bromley.

<sup>205</sup> In Sikkim.

<sup>206</sup> Hedley Greenwood, (1916-1982) Borbam T.E., Amduri-Haloating, went to India in 1939, married to Beryl Butterworth in 1947.

<sup>207</sup> Geoffrey Johnson Smith (1924-2010), TV presenter then M.P.

<sup>208</sup> Education Committee

<sup>209</sup> The China-India tensions rise, leading later to a brief war in 1962;

<sup>210</sup> Martin Buckmaster who had moved into the other half of Field Head with his parents.

<sup>211</sup> House of Commons

<sup>212</sup> Robert Rhodes James *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1959)

<sup>213</sup> My father sitting in the second row, second left.

<sup>214</sup> Chairman of the Assam Company.

<sup>215</sup> A Mawari businessman from whom my father had taken a loan.

<sup>216</sup> Two missionaries, Isabella Kelly and Josephine Thompson, were going to Sarawak, from Broughton Hall, near Eccleshall, let to nuns of the Franciscan order of St Joseph.

<sup>217</sup> Geoffrey Bromley had gone to Sarawak

<sup>218</sup> Terence J. Luscombe, born 1940, went to India on 'Caledonia', which departed Liverpool 15 October 1960.

<sup>219</sup> Eric John Hooker Hannay, O.B.E., born in 1913 married to Frances, superintendant of the Jorehat Tea Company and Chairman of the Assam Branch of the India Tea Association. Keyhung T.E., Hoogrijan 1960-1.

<sup>220</sup> Car driving lessons.

<sup>221</sup> A religious camp.

- <sup>222</sup> No diaries of this nature survive.
- <sup>223</sup> Michael Peter Lane, bn. 1939, came out to Assam at the end of 1959.
- <sup>224</sup> Frances Hope Hannay
- <sup>225</sup> The *Tea Share Manual* for 1961 lists ASSAM & AFRICAN HOLDINGS LIMITED (formerly Assam Company, Limited).
- <sup>226</sup> John (Jack) Rowel Simpson, married Tyleen in 1941. He was brought in from the Jorehaut Tea Company in January 1961 rather than being an internal appointment, for the first time in the Company's history, with a mandate to overhaul the Company, which was financially struggling.
- <sup>227</sup> This was Julie (Julianna), my first girl-friend in Oxford. My parallel life at Oxford in these years is told in Alan Macfarlane, *Oxford Undergraduate* (2019).
- <sup>228</sup> Cambridge won by just over four lengths.
- <sup>229</sup> Harry Vincent Douglas Langworthy (1918-2001) was in the Assam Regiment and a friend of my father. He was a farmer living at North Down Farm, Chagford, Devon.
- <sup>230</sup> The school is still there.
- <sup>231</sup> Adolf Eichmann's trial ended with his execution on 1st June 1962.
- <sup>232</sup> The Marsdens lived near Blandford, Dorset. Edmund Percy Marsden, born 1918, was in the Bombay Grenadiers during the war, with my father.
- <sup>233</sup> Copthorne Preparatory School, Copthorne, Crawley, West Sussex.
- <sup>234</sup> Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, located in Nalanda, Bihar, established in 1951, a centre for higher studies in Pali and Buddhism.
- <sup>235</sup> In fact the letter was forwarded from Field Head to Robert and Angela's flat in Old Brompton Road.
- <sup>236</sup> Alan Barnes was one of my closer friends at Sedbergh. A colourful character whose expulsion from Sedbergh is surrounded by many stories. For further background on the Sedbergh dimension, see Alan Macfarlane, *Sedbergh Schooldays* (2019).
- <sup>237</sup> Published as Iris Macfarlane, *The Children of Bird God Hill* (1967).
- <sup>238</sup> Another of my close friends at Sedbergh.
- <sup>239</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *An Introduction to the House of Commons* (1961).
- <sup>240</sup> By coincidence the one performed by Worcester College Buskins and which I went to the previous summer.
- <sup>241</sup> He was born in 1940, thus two years ahead of me at Sedbergh School. He went to India in 1960.
- <sup>242</sup> Nikita Khrushchev leader of the Soviet Union.
- <sup>243</sup> Mrs Knappett was a Lake District friend who had let Alan and his family hold a party in her house in January 1960. The event is described in Alan Macfarlane, *Lakeland Life* (2019).
- <sup>244</sup> Vinobha Bhavé was an Indian advocate of nonviolence and human rights. Often called Acharya, he is best known for the Bhoodan Movement. He is considered as a National Teacher of India and the spiritual successor of Mohandas Gandhi.
- <sup>245</sup> This was the nickname given to the Humber Hawk car belonging to my father. Humbert Humbert was the name of the main protagonist in Nabokov's novel *Lolita*.
- <sup>246</sup> Bill and Agnes Beattie were with the Assam Tea Company from 1961-6.
- <sup>247</sup> Refers to the fact that the letter is typed in red ink.
- <sup>248</sup> In December 1961 King Mahendra appointed a council of five ministers to help run the administration. Several weeks later, political parties were declared illegal.
- <sup>249</sup> Peter Farquharson Remnant, born 1897, married to Elizabeth. Conservative Member of Parliament for Wokingham from 1950-1959. Educated at Eton and Oxford. Fought in the First World War and became a Lieutenant, and became a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Second World War in the Royal Artillery and Staff.
- <sup>250</sup> Wife of Stephen Gilbert Bathe Brown "Gussel"
- <sup>251</sup> Lt.-Col. F.W.S. Roberts, Chairman and Managing Director. (Hon. P.F. Remnant was also a Director).
- <sup>252</sup> College collections, or termly exams.
- <sup>253</sup> Owain Trevor Jenkins (1907-1996), married to Sybil Leonie Herbert in 1940.
- <sup>254</sup> Wedding anniversary.
- <sup>255</sup> This was a spoof party on an island on Windermere, where we were all stranded. We took revenge by arranging another spoof party at David's house.
- <sup>256</sup> Leslie Sawtell, Company accountant.
- <sup>257</sup> South Bombay where there was a swimming club.
- <sup>258</sup> Charlotte Mason College, Ambleside, was a teacher training college.
- <sup>259</sup> Robert and Angela's flat.
- <sup>260</sup> Emma was Robert and Angela's second child.

<sup>261</sup> *Stop the World - I Want to Get Off* - a very popular musical.  
<sup>262</sup> Robert and Angela's elder daughter  
<sup>263</sup> Alastair Ian Youngson Wright who was to be acting manager at Cherideo from 12th July during my father's absence. The dogs were clearly left in his charge.  
<sup>264</sup> Shops in England.  
<sup>265</sup> It appears that my landlady was not happy with my eating in my room.  
<sup>266</sup> Alexander Stiven Barrie, born 1923, married to Hilda, joined the staff of Assam Tea Company in 1945.  
<sup>267</sup> Wright  
<sup>268</sup> Mawari traders  
<sup>269</sup> Ordinary soldier  
<sup>270</sup> Managing Agent for the Assam Company in Calcutta. Established in the late 1861 by E B Kilburn. Their interests were in tea, river steamers & the electricity generation industry. They were Agents for motor vehicles & agricultural machinery manufacturers  
<sup>271</sup> Wife of Robert Baldwin White of Mohokutie T.E.  
<sup>272</sup> Simon R. Hill of Deleng T.E., Selaghat.  
<sup>273</sup> Dr Poole. There was no vet at Nazira.  
<sup>274</sup> Dollar Academy, Dollar, Clackmannanshire, Scotland was the school where my father was a pupil.  
<sup>275</sup> Daphne Meredith's mother.  
<sup>276</sup> Simpson  
<sup>277</sup> Poole  
<sup>278</sup> Adele, Liz Leetham's five-year old daughter.  
<sup>279</sup> Restaurant in Park Street  
<sup>280</sup> Possibly wife of A.D. Cleland, Namsang T.E., Jeypore, Assam.  
<sup>281</sup> Country club in the south of Calcutta  
<sup>282</sup> Possibly Johanna, wife of Roy Boswell of Behubor T.E, Nazira  
<sup>283</sup> Chabua Tea Co. Ltd. - Managing Agent, Finley, Muir & Co.  
<sup>284</sup> Wife of Hedley A. Greenwood, Borbam T.E., Amduri-Haloating, Assam  
<sup>285</sup> Wife of Frank P. Mulvey, Borsapori T.E., Numaligarh - Jorehaut Tea Company  
<sup>286</sup> Janet, wife of Dacre John Gare Mogg, Numalighur T.E., Numalighur, Assam  
<sup>287</sup> Wife of Peter Ramsay Cruden, Kharikatia T.E., Kharikatia, Mariani, Assam  
<sup>288</sup> R.N. Clifford, Kathonibari T.E., Mariani - Jorehaut Tea Co. Managing Agent, James Warren & Co. Ltd  
<sup>289</sup> Jorehaut Tea Co. Ltd. & Amgoorie Tea Estates Ltd. - Managing Agent, James Warren & Co. Ltd  
<sup>290</sup> M.K. Poddar, Socklatinga T.E., Gatonga - Socklatinga Tea Co. Ltd. 32, Cross Street, Cal-7  
<sup>291</sup> Possibly John Ellis Sawtell who worked to Braithwaite & Co., and engineering firm in Calcutta. No kinship link to Leslie Sawtell has been found.  
<sup>292</sup> John Maxwell Trinick an agricultural scientist at Tocklai  
<sup>293</sup> T.J. Newman Rogers, Pabhoi T.E., Mijikajan, Assam  
<sup>294</sup> D.S. Kincaid, Jorehaut Tea Co.  
<sup>295</sup> Michael A. Fitzpatrick-Robertson, married Eleanor in 1965. He was listed as having a company car at Cherideo from 1962.  
<sup>296</sup> Pet dog.  
<sup>297</sup> J.S. Bach  
<sup>298</sup> Robert Rhodes James's book *Rosebery* was published on 1st January 1963.  
<sup>299</sup> Barbara Munsey died on 15th December 1962, in Calcutta.  
<sup>300</sup> Pet monkey?  
<sup>301</sup> Admiral Sir Harold Walker, 1891-1975, was Chairman of the Directors of Amgoorie Tea Estates.  
<sup>302</sup> Unmarried name Harper, the sister of Donald's brother Alan's wife Jean.  
<sup>303</sup> On 15 January 1963 General De Gaulle laid down impossible conditions for Britain's entry into the European Economic Community.  
<sup>304</sup> Primrose Corps born in 1944.  
<sup>305</sup> D. Barua, was Assistant at Cherideo.  
<sup>306</sup> Trevor Huddleston (1913-1998) Born in Bedford, England. In 1939 he joined an Anglican religious order, the Community of the Resurrection, and was sent as a missionary to South Africa in 1943. He became a staunch campaigner against Apartheid but was recalled to England in 1955 for fear for his safety. His book about the forcible removal programme in in Sophiatown, *Naught for your Comfort*, was published in 1956.  
<sup>307</sup> Assam Tea Company Papers  
<sup>308</sup> Pet monkey

<sup>309</sup> Published by the Hakluyt Society

<sup>310</sup> The Plantations Labour Act, 1951, which sought to provide for the welfare of labour and to regulate the conditions of workers in plantations. Under this law, the State Governments have been empowered to take all feasible steps to improve the lot of the plantation workers. The passing of PLA brought some improvements in the plantations sector. It also helped in creating conditions for organising the workers and the rise of trade unions.

<sup>311</sup> E.M. Forster

<sup>312</sup> The Salesian order founded the Don Bosco High School Guwahati in 1948.

<sup>313</sup> British essayist, dramatist, and politician Sir Richard Steele (1672-1729) is best known for his collaboration with Addison on a series of essays for the Tatler and the Spectator.

<sup>314</sup> Verrier Elwin did not die until February 1964.

<sup>315</sup> John A.T. Robinson *Honest to God*, published 1963. In criticising traditional Christian theology it aroused a storm of controversy.

<sup>316</sup> Crush, Tear and Curl

<sup>317</sup> He and his wife left on 2nd June and my father took over as acting General Manager.

<sup>318</sup> Anne's birthday was on June 3rd.

<sup>319</sup> Novel by D.H. Lawrence about Mexico published in 1926.

<sup>320</sup> Temporary structure

<sup>321</sup> Robert White, born in 1912, married to Phyllis, was at Mohokhuti T.E. at this time.

<sup>322</sup> Tura Government College, established in 1958.

<sup>323</sup> 26th July 1963

<sup>324</sup> Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Allen Drury, published in 1959.

<sup>325</sup> Possibly from Peter Quennell an editor of 'History Today' about the article on Sir Thomas Roe which they published in November 1964.

<sup>326</sup> Robert Graves *The White Goddess* Amended and enlarged edition, 1961

<sup>327</sup> Mayo college in Ajmer, Rajasthan, founded in 1875, a boys-only independent boarding school.

<sup>328</sup> Dr Mylchrest was the family doctor in Ambleside.

<sup>329</sup> At this time, the House of Lords was debating the Commonwealth Development Bill. Lord Colyton was Minister of State for Colonial Affairs 1952-55.

<sup>330</sup> Rosemary Sutcliff *Sword at Sunset*, published in 1963.

<sup>331</sup> Chatto & Windus published her *Tales & Legends from India* in 1965.

<sup>332</sup> Tony Connell joined the Assam Tea Company at this time. Terry Luscombe had resigned.

<sup>333</sup> Her most influential book was *Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1911)

<sup>334</sup> John and Brenda Finney, who became close friends of Iris and Donald.

<sup>335</sup> 'The Britannia Inn' at Elterwater near Ambleside.

<sup>336</sup> The island of Gigha in the Inner Hebrides. The minister was Donald Macfarlane (1861-1923).

<sup>337</sup> Lt. General Kunhiraman Palat Candeth (1916-2003) led an operation to annexe Goa from Portuguese colonial rule and served briefly as Lt. Governor of the state in December 1961-June 1962. In 1963 he took command of the newly raised 8th Mountain Division of North-East India where he fought, with little success, against the Naga insurgency in Assam.

<sup>338</sup> Christopher Hill, Master of Balliol.

<sup>339</sup> William Elijah Dowsing

<sup>340</sup> Leslie Victor Woollett

<sup>341</sup> The assassination of John F. Kennedy on 22nd November 1963.

<sup>342</sup> Giacomo Lauri-Volpi (1892-1979), opera singer.

<sup>343</sup> Alalendu Gupta

<sup>344</sup> Gulab Khushiram Kalani

<sup>345</sup> Douglas Henry Maurice Cooper Romans.

<sup>346</sup> Iris Macfarlane, 'An English Ambassador at the Court of the Great Moghul; The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe 1615-1619', *History Today*, published November 1964.

<sup>347</sup> The State of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on 1st December 1963, with Kohima as its state capital.

<sup>348</sup> The Daily Telegraph

<sup>349</sup> Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, *Tunkhungia Buranji* or *A History of Assam (1681-1826)*. Rai Bahadur Surya Kumar Bhuyan MBE (1894-1964) was a writer, historian, and a poet.

<sup>350</sup> A notable children's author, writer of *The Sword in the Stone* and other classics.

<sup>351</sup> A.P. Watt who remained Iris's agent for some years.

<sup>352</sup> Alec Barrie, born in 1923, came to the Assam Tea Company in 1945.

<sup>353</sup> Bernier, François, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668*  
<sup>354</sup> At Khoomtaie T.E.  
<sup>355</sup> Fleeing from East Pakistan, accusing the Muslims of persecution.  
<sup>356</sup> Townsend Miller *The Castles and the Crown: Spain, 1451-1555* (1963)  
<sup>357</sup> V.K. Krishan Menon (1896-1974). Nehru died on 27 May 1964 and was followed by Lal Bahadur Shastri as Prime Minister.  
<sup>358</sup> Dr Winchester was Medical Officer of Health, stationed at Sibsagar.  
<sup>359</sup> Hilda Grieve, *Examples of English Handwriting*, see below.  
<sup>360</sup> A phrase I had quoted from David Riesman's work, *Individualism Reconsidered*, (1954), 48  
<sup>361</sup> Greek dramatist (c. 342/41-c. 290 BC)  
<sup>362</sup> My second motorbike was a 250 c.c. BSA.  
<sup>363</sup> Constantin Lipatti (from childhood called by the diminutive "Dinu") was born in Bucharest into a musical family: his father was a violinist, his mother a pianist. Born 1917, died in 1950.  
<sup>364</sup> J.G. Frazer.  
<sup>365</sup> I had originally been entered for a two year M.Litt., and this refers to the approval for a three year D.Phil.  
<sup>366</sup> Part of a peace mission to Nagaland.  
<sup>367</sup> Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954)  
<sup>368</sup> A Teton story appears in Iris's book *Tales and Legends from India* published 1965  
<sup>369</sup> This was Robin Briggs, who was elected a Prize Fellow of All Souls in 1964.  
<sup>370</sup> John Steinbeck (1939)  
<sup>371</sup> Margaret Agnes Harper, born in 1917 in Uganda, younger sister of Jean, the wife of Donald's younger brother, Alan.  
<sup>372</sup> Norman Esslemont, born 1917, married to Helen, born 1921, at Napuk Tea Estate, Assam.  
<sup>373</sup> Ivan and Cynthia Rufus, who later retired to Australia.  
<sup>374</sup> Michael Strachan (1919-2000), wrote *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* (1962) and *Sir Thomas Roe* (1989).  
<sup>375</sup> Norman Cohn *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1959)  
<sup>376</sup> In Manchester, where Fiona had her room as a student.  
<sup>377</sup> Professor B. R. Grover, the Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research died in 2001 aged 77. He was a historian of medieval India.  
<sup>378</sup> Bihar  
<sup>379</sup> The Old Fort.  
<sup>380</sup> Flood pond.  
<sup>381</sup> Within Akbar's fort, Ajmer, Rajasthan  
<sup>382</sup> Gertrude Hollis (pub. 1913)  
<sup>383</sup> Published in *History Today* on 8th August 1965.  
<sup>384</sup> Mike and Cathy Courtney, of the Indian Tea Association, though they are not in the Assam Directory.  
<sup>385</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Gallipoli* (1965).  
<sup>386</sup> A Scots word for doubt, indecision, being in two minds.  
<sup>387</sup> James Gordon Macnee, born in 1927, tea planter, was married to Charlotte. Jimmy Macnee was the younger brother of the actor Patrick, Mr Steed of 'The Avengers'.  
<sup>388</sup> Aurangabad district, Maharashtra  
<sup>389</sup> John Freeman was a Television journalist, presenter of 'Face to Face' and a Member of Parliament. He became High Commissioner in New Delhi in 1965.  
<sup>390</sup> Ronald Segal (pub. 1965)  
<sup>391</sup> Dr H.J. Taylor, resigned in 1974.  
<sup>392</sup> The Pakistan cyclone and build-up to war.  
<sup>393</sup> Alan Moorehead *Gallipoli* (pub. 1956)  
<sup>394</sup> Near Sonari  
<sup>395</sup> Social anthropologist  
<sup>396</sup> Robert Higham took over from Simpson, not as General Manager but Superintendent.. The company headquarters were to be moved to Macneill & Barry in Calcutta at Calcutta, and Nazira became the eastern regional headquarters of ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation).  
<sup>397</sup> Author of *Wolf Solent*  
<sup>398</sup> Fiona's dog.  
<sup>399</sup> S.P. Sinha, Director, Macneill & Barry, 2, Fairlie Place, Calcutta-1.  
<sup>400</sup> Robbery of £2.6 million from a Royal Mail train heading from Glasgow to London on the West Coast Main Line in the early hours of 8th August 1963

- <sup>401</sup> Robert Arthur Hughes, an important missionary doctor in Assam who Iris and Donald had known for many years. Their contacts with Dr. Hughes is described in Alan Macfarlane, *India: Beginnings and Endings* (2019)
- <sup>402</sup> By Louis Auchincloss (pub. 1964)
- <sup>403</sup> *Tales and Legends from India* (pub. Chatto & Windus ,1965).
- <sup>404</sup> crepe myrtle
- <sup>405</sup> Rodolfo Acquaviva, Jesuit missionary to India at the Court of Akbar the Great
- <sup>406</sup> Novel by Rudyard Kipling
- <sup>407</sup> By Rose Macaulay (pub. 1953)
- <sup>408</sup> By Ronald Segal, published January 1965.
- <sup>409</sup> *The Emperor Babur and Vasco da Gama*, History Today, August 1965.
- <sup>410</sup> By Miss Read.
- <sup>411</sup> The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure was founded in 1964 by Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley, to undertake quantitative research in family history and demographic history.
- <sup>412</sup> The Indo-Pakistan war started in April 1965 over a disputed border in the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. In June, the British Government managed to persuade both parties to negotiate a truce. However, Pakistan believing that it could rely on the discontent of the people in the disputed area of Kashmir crossed the line of control on 5th August, initiating a second front when the Indian forces crossed the cease fire line on 15th August. The attempt to seize Kashmir failed and the fighting reached a stalemate. A ceasefire was agreed on 22nd September 1965 and the War ended the following day.
- <sup>413</sup> The luggage was noted in a letter from Sibsagar Transport Agency as having been shipped for Calcutta on 27th August 1965. Unfortunately it was impounded and held in a sealed cargo godown subject to the findings of a Prize Court in Dacca, East Pakistan. It was only released after a couple of years, thanks in part to the intervention of Erik Pearse, a friend from my undergraduate years at Worcester, who was in Dacca in August 1967. The seven crates finally arrived at the end of March 1968.
- <sup>414</sup> A small, uninhabited, Hebridean island off Harris.